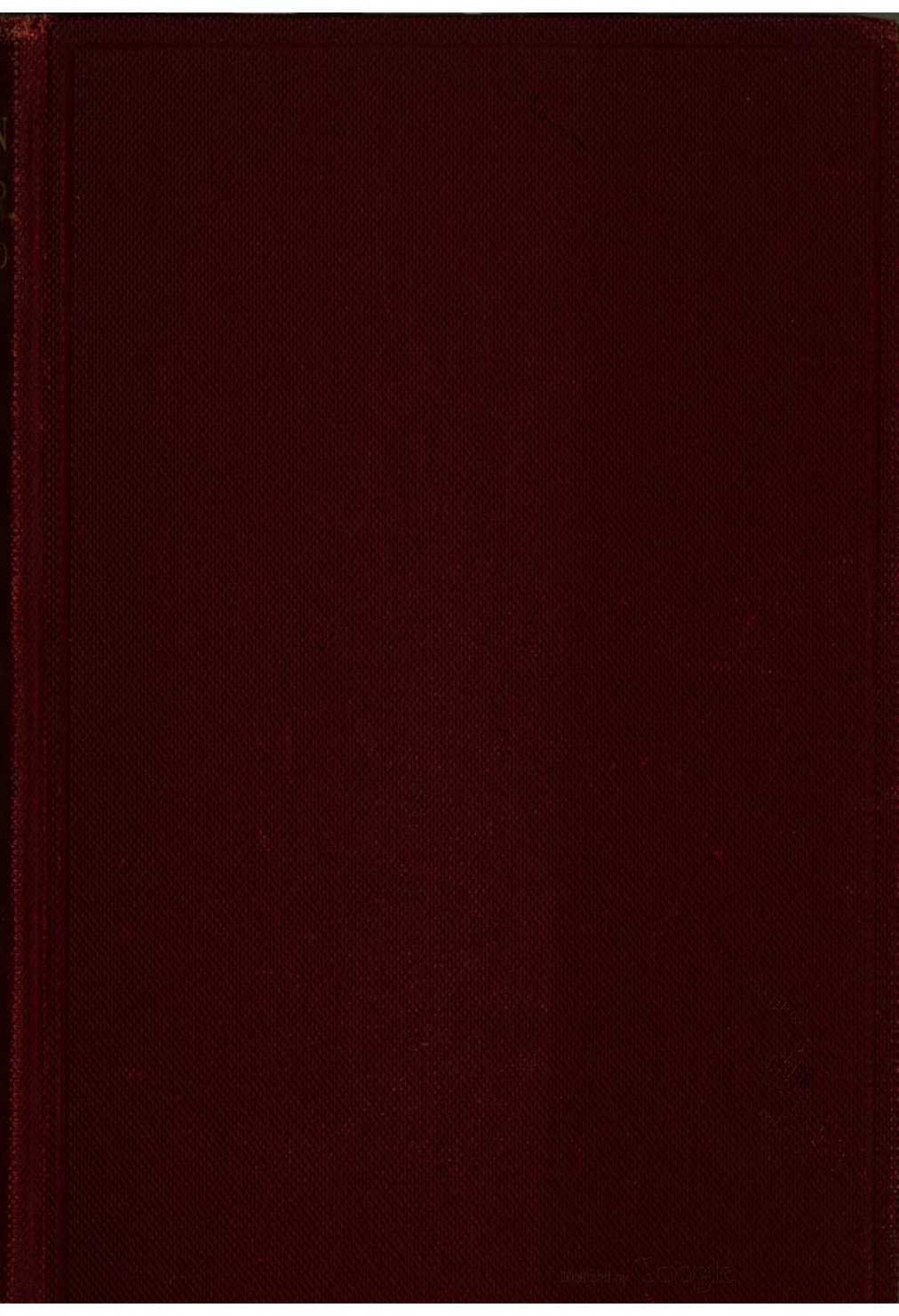

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SIMON PETER, SHEPHERD

By
FRANCIS BOURNE UPHAM
("THOMAS")



NEW YORK : EATON & MAINS
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INTRODUCTION

THE two letters that follow—one to my boy and the other to my old friend Simon Peter—explain the purpose of this little volume of sermons.

The first letter was written by me to my son during his senior year in college. He was tired out and in need of a bit of rest, and, what was more serious, had drifted quite far away from the faith of the church. Down deep in his heart I believed he wanted to get back, for he ever “approved things that were excellent.”

Simon Peter years ago, in a moment of strange misunderstanding, had called me Thomas, thinking that I was one of the chosen Twelve, back once more in this life of depression and doubt. Whether the name suited me or not, I do not know. All that I can say is, my boy was much like his father.

The second letter was sent at the same time. My boy did not know that I had written it, or that I had even indirectly

communicated with Simon Peter. It was not till years afterward—on the day of his ordination to the Christian ministry—that I told him what I had done. It was not till that day also that my son admitted to me that he had suspected what I was driving at all along. “Still, I’ll forgive you,” said he, “though I’d like to pay you back.” I read his answer in the light of the laughter and love of his face rather than in his words.

These sermons of my old friend that are accounted for in this little book by these two letters—or, rather, the pious conceit behind them—have gone through two or three changes. My son heard them, took full notes, and sent them immediately to me. I copied them for the printer, taking a few liberties in the omission of personalities and the rounding out of a few imperfect sentences. I present the best report possible. Still, to see the strength of any sermon, if not its beauty, you must see and hear the man of God when he preaches it.

LETTER FROM "THOMAS" TO "THOMAS, JR."

MY DEAR BOY:

I think you'd better quit studying for a time and go off for a rest. Inclosed you'll find a check that will get you a ticket and pay for a trip to Maine.

By all means hunt up Simon Peter. Remember me to him most heartily, and get from him, if you can, a dozen or more of his sermons. I want to use them—can't do much decent work of my own, you know.

Yours lovingly,

FATHER.

LETTER FROM "THOMAS" TO "SIMON PETER "

DEAR SIMON PETER:

My boy is coming down to see you. I think you can do him good. He's a fine young fellow—but, in other respects, too much like his father. He seems to have lost his bearings and needs some one to set him right.

He is not very well and needs a change for a few weeks. His work in college is such that he can be away a month or so beyond his midwinter vacation and not lose much.

If he can help you in any way, I know he will be glad to do it for my sake, to say nothing of gratitude to you. Even the children in my home can never forget you because of what, by the grace of God, you did for me.

I have asked my boy to send me a full report—verbatim, if possible—of a dozen or more of your sermons. If you think the chance worth while, you have it; and I'll ask Some One to guide you both.

Always cordially yours,

THOMAS.

P. S.—John says that he wishes he too had a son to send to you. Mary and Martha send most cordial greetings.

I
THE GADARENE
OR
THE BEST APPOINTMENT ON EARTH

"Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel."—Mark 5. 19, 20.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

I inclose report of a sermon preached two or three nights ago by Simon Peter in a district school. The little building was crowded to the doors, for it was full moonlight, the sleighing was good, and there is a deep religious interest throughout the community.

Simon Peter has been much disturbed of late by the rumor that one of his recent converts, a clumsy young farmer, who has been saved from a most dissipated life, is planning to go to the "mission field." Some one has told him that he is needed immediately in India—that millions of awakened heathen are awaiting his coming. It is said that he has written to the Mission Office asking for two weeks' more time in which to make up his mind. I hear that he asked his brethren in class meeting to pray for him that God might pardon him for delaying so long.

Whether the young fellow was present or not when this sermon was preached, I do not know; but I guess it "found lodgment," as you used to say.

Yours lovingly,

THOMAS.

I

THE GADARENE

I'VE no interest just now in the great commission. I am thinking of a greater one. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," are the words of the Lord, I know; but just now they do not appeal to me. The farms over yonder in the valley, the village street with shop and store, and the welcoming door of many a friend, the saddened homes I am thinking of up on the hillside—these look larger to-night than whole groups of islands in some far-off sea, even the names of which I do not know. They ought to; they are the homes of our neighbors; they are our own homes. They have the family altar at which we first knelt in prayer, the table around which we gather at the end of a busy day—father, mother, children—each one with his simple story of humble deeds, his vision, dreams, plans, and promises. They ought to look larger to a normal sinner saved by grace than even the Dark Conti-

ment. Not till I believe that Peter, James, and John were no more to our Lord than the curious crowds that thronged the roadside will I say that a man's home is not more to him than all the world besides. The foreign missionary is the man we have to account for, not the man who stays at home.

To this Gadarene, whose story I have read as the lesson, who besought the Lord that he might go with him, ready, I doubt not, to stand on the corners of the streets of Jerusalem and plead with men to turn to God—to him the Master said, "Return to your home, and tell your story there."

'Tis the one place on earth where that story was needed. A few years ago there was converted a man, a dozen miles or so from where we are to-night, whom I can never forget. His was a genuine case; no half work. I heard him say in prayer meeting a few weeks afterward, "The man I am does not know the man I was." All the neighborhood was interested. The loafers in the country store; the farmer whose meadow lot joined his, who was always fighting with him about the boundary line; the man's brother, who had been

disgusted for years; the good old class leader, who had led him to Christ—all were eager to hear the story. But there were a few people, the members of one family circle, who needed to hear it. All these other people could have gotten along very well without it. The loafers in the country store could just as easily have taken up some other bit of gossip; the neighbor could have found enough to satisfy him in his weekly paper; the brother and the good old Christian worker could have put the whole thing one side as they had done similar reports of conversion that had been proven to be groundless many a time before; but there was one family that couldn't. One poor woman and the children God had given her could have lived more easily on half the food that came to their table—though God knows they had little or nothing; could have gone without the fire on the hearth through the bitter winter; could have given away more readily some of the years of blooming youth of the daughter, just coming to womanhood, or the last few months of life of the white-haired saint, old before her time, who had kept the home together—

could have done all this rather than have lost the story of that glorious conversion in the schoolhouse on the hillside. One family needed that story, one and only one, and to that one, by the grace of God, that man was sent: to the one place on earth where what he had to say was needed—needed as nothing else under God's broad heaven was needed.

So was it with this Gadarene. If he knew the contrast between what he was and what he had been—as I imagine he did—if he realized at all the beauty and worth of a woman's love, and the pathetic trust of little children in the man who bears the name of father, provided he give them a ghost of a chance to believe in him, he shouted for joy all along the way from the seashore to his home. "Thank God," I hear him saying, "he might have sent me off with the rest of them to some God-forsaken town where the story of any convert could have done as well as mine. Thank God, he didn't; he sent me where my story is needed."

For there is one place on earth where a man amounts to something, even the hum-

blest of us. When he gets away from it he shrinks to his normal size, he falls back where he belongs. But his wife doesn't know it, and his children don't know it. They think that the poorest of us is all right, due to a blindness that is as much a gift of God as is the clear vision that sees the beauty in the face of a smiling child, or the roses by the wayside. So the little thing that had to do with the humblest of us to some poor souls seems large—a passing sneer, a shallow compliment, a careless recognition, or an equally careless bit of neglect. “Did you see what the people said of your father?” asked the mother, with tender pride, her eyes not opened during all these years of blinded love. “Did you read what the paper said of him, my boy?” Say, man, live up to what they think you are.

So, if the little things seem large, the large things seem fearfully so. If the report that the father had done a questionable act could cast gloom over a home, what about the act itself, or one a thousand times as bad in the presence of them all? One day that Gadarene came home raving

mad. The blood of his ancestors, or the sins of his youth, or the curse of the evil one—something is at work. Oaths are followed by blows, and the blows fall on the shrinking form of the wife he had promised to shelter; on the mother trying to shield her fair-haired baby from his maddened father. Large! Large! Is there anything else that can seem large to that home now? Don't talk to that woman about the great fire that wiped out a city, or the wreck of some battleship, or the crash of the fall of a state under the attack of a people infuriated for generations. Don't talk to that woman of some czar tottering on his throne. She has something large to think about. Leave your trivial gossip for a lazy afternoon, some sleepy day in June. She is concerned over larger things—her husband is a madman!

I say, the story of that deed done on the shore of Galilee, that blessed gift of grace of a compassionate Saviour—that story is needed in the Gadarene's home. The little audience that gathers awe-stricken about the fireplace, on the night of the home-coming, will not lose one word. "How did

you know who he was?" one of the children asks timidly. "What did he look like? Do you think he will come here?"

O, man, I say, that Gadarene had a great appointment. It was the one place on earth where every other man would have made a failure. Some stories can be told only by those who are a part of them. They are too great or too sacred to be intrusted to anybody else. Angels at the tomb of our Lord made a failure with their Easter sermon. Mary needed to hear the Master. Our Lord's disciples during the first few days following his resurrection bothered Thomas every time they spoke to him. The poor fellow who knew enough to keep quiet—who hardly dared show his thoughts on his happy face—strange to say, was the best preacher of all, for every word spoken only made matters worse. Thomas needed the Master himself. So is it with these home folks of ours. You can never send your love to your wife by a third party. You must tell it yourself. You can kiss your little boy and bid him carry that kiss to his mother, not to drop it on the way; you can laugh your love across the table,

when the little toddler lifts his upturned chubby face to the one woman you love, his cheeks aglow with his tender errand. You can send your love by your baby boy, but even that is not enough; you must whisper it yourself; two must be all the world at times. Peter would have made a failure in that Gadarene's home; he would have forgotten some of the details of the story in his hurry to get through. John would have failed, for he didn't think the story worth repeating when years afterward he wrote our Lord's life. Even the best of them would have failed. The Gadarene must come himself. Peter, James, and John may go elsewhere.

You say you have no education, my friend—that a few weeks in a district school years ago gave you all the training you ever had. You tell me that you are a poor man—that you do not know where the next payment on the mortgage on your little farm is coming from; you say that a five-dollar bill looks as large to you as—well, as it looks to me. You tell me, in a moment of great frankness, that you have no standing in your own village—that you ran for

moderator once of the town meeting and got three votes. You tell me about your littleness, and I believe all you say, though I think you flatter yourself—you would tell no lie if you were to take off a little more; yet you are the only one to make a success as a preacher in your home, if the theme of your sermon be the compassionate work of the Lord Jesus Christ in your own life.

Last summer a missionary from a Western city told me of a man he knew who was soundly converted from a most drunken and degraded life. No sooner did he find the Lord than he wanted to go home and tell his wife about it. He lived in a hovel; chairs, carpets, tables, beds, everything had gone for drink. When he opened the door the poor wife shrank away in terror, and the children ran to hide themselves. "Mary," said he, "don't run away from me. I won't hurt you. Come to me, Mary; I'm a changed man; I'm converted; I ain't goin' to drink any more, I ain't goin' to be bad to you any more; I'm a converted man, Mary." That is what I call a sermon, and a great one too. The bishop at the Conference couldn't have done as well: men

whose names stir the big cities of the world, whose thoughts guide the nation, when compared with him, would have made a failure. In the home of the Gadarene, the poor man whose name yesterday was Legion, is the only preacher who can do anything large. Words that would sound well in India or China, a message that would stir a province in Japan, a call to God that would make the hardened sinners of the cities of this old world tremble, would have had no effect there. It is the message of the blessing on the seashore, given by the sinner himself, that tells. I say, that was a great appointment.

It was the only place where that man would be at his best. I guess he told his experience a good many times before he went out of the effective ranks. My impression is that he swung round to the story of what the Lord had done for him, how he had done it, and what he wanted of him after his conversion, in season and out of season. I knew a man once who never preached from the same text twice, so he says, and who preached for more than fifty years; yet he never had more than two or

three sermons. No matter where he started, in Chronicles or Corinthians, in Job or the Gospel of John, back in Genesis or deep down in the Revelation of the beloved disciple, he always veered around to the same point. He always told what the Lord had done for him, of the happy day when Jesus washed his sins away. Mind you, I don't say that he made a mistake. I remember that Paul, who could see farther back toward the beginnings of things than any man except possibly Moses or the apostle John, and who was blessed with a vision of the glories of the third heaven—I remember that Paul fell back on his Damascus experience on the slightest provocation. I am not saying that he made a mistake, I am only stating what he did, and saying that the Gadarene most probably did the same.

When that old class leader asked him to say a word or two, he got right up and told what the Lord had done for him. When his neighbor opened up his kitchen for a cottage prayer meeting, and asked him to lead it, he had the same story. When his brother finally admitted that it looked as if

he were sincere, and asked him to preach in the little village church where he worshiped, he took a new text, but dropped it quick, and ran for refuge to the old familiar story. I say, he told that story a great many times, but never as he told it in his own home. Why, the whole man spoke then; words were the last thing needed. His hands spoke, his quivering body spoke, his face flushing with a heaven-sent emotion spoke, his eyes spoke, and as for the words that were the least of all the messengers in carrying the truth, he never had such freedom; he had the gift of tongues for once sure. Of course he had, for he never had such an audience. Paul said of a certain church that he couldn't make any headway there because his words were not mingled with faith on the part of those who heard them, and our Lord could do no mighty work in Nazareth because of man's unbelief. Think of it! Paul having a hard time preaching! Our Lord not being able to do a mighty deed! 'Tis the audience that makes or breaks a sermon.

I remember coming home one Sunday afternoon in winter from a service I had

held in a schoolhouse five miles away. I'd had a good time preaching. I'd enjoyed a good sleigh ride over the hills. I'd had the chance to talk to the big-hearted sinner who went along with me, and urge him to give his heart to the Lord and turn his energies the right way. I remember the welcome my wife and children gave me. They had just kindled a fire on the wide-open hearth. As I entered the door it was leaping and laughing through all the fireplace and sending its cheer into the deepest shadows of the room. A simple supper was spread on my baby girl's work table. The children were in a circle on the floor, and my wife in the little rocking-chair she had owned since she was a girl. I remember that she asked me what I had preached about, and that my oldest boy said, "Let's hear you tell it over again, father." I remember that hour. Preach? I wish I could preach as I did to that little group; they'd make me a presiding elder! I had everything to help me, everything I could have, yet the Gadarene had more. It was the first time he had ever told his personal experience. It was the first time that little audience had

been gathered together. It was the first time the guardian angels of that home felt like praising the Lord. I tell you, the night when that man came home was a night never to be forgotten. For once he was equal to his best.

Talk about the home-coming of the prodigal as much as you want to. I know of no home-coming that has more pathos in it, and beauty, too, than this one. The prodigal came to a home of plenty; the Gadarene, to one of poverty. The prodigal found an immediate welcome, the Gadarene the shrinking and instinctive suspicion of a wounded, bleeding heart. The prodigal had given him a ring, a robe, and a kiss of welcome; the Gadarene, a crust of bread. The grand old father of the prodigal ran and fell on his neck and kissed him; the saddened wife of the Gadarene, if she was like the saints I know, sank down at his feet, sobbing as if her heart would break—the story was too good to be true. O, I tell you, that Gadarene envied no man his place. “Go to Jerusalem, Peter, if you want to. Hire a hall in Capernaum, Thomas. Stand on the temple steps, John. Go

anywhere this side or the other side of the gates of heaven. Go anywhere and find the best audience you can gather together and then offer to change places with me and see what I will say to you!" That is about what the Gadarene thought, as he climbed through his broken fences and saw the ruins of the farm he had left years before to go to the caves of the wild beast, and the mire of the swine—that is about what he said, if I know anything of human nature, blessed by the touch of the compassionate Saviour; and that is about what you ought to say.

Man, go home, and tell your friends what great things the Lord hath done for you. Go home, and let Peter, James, and John cross the sea. Thank God that by his grace he sends you to the best appointment on earth.

II
THE BLIND BOY
OR
EVANGELISM THAT TELLS

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him."—John 9. 35-38.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

Simon has been much in prayer for a revival; and from what I see at the corner store, and out on the church steps, a revival is sadly needed. To his amazement, one of his stewards—the storekeeper, I was afterward told—said to him that he, too, was praying for a “blessing upon Zion.” He incidentally added that he knew of the man who could secure it; that he had heard the “Whirlwind Evangelist” on his last trip to the city, and was quite sure that he was the one man on earth who could open for them the windows of heaven.

He told Peter that he had already made arrangements with him to come to their church. “That is,” said he, hastily, as he saw the old preacher’s face, “I will make them if you think best.”

That night, as we were talking it all over after the service, the old man said, “Some of these men are all right—some of them. Well,” said he, quietly, with a curious twinkle of the eyes, “they are no better than I am, and I don’t think this church can stand more than one Peter just now. Ask your father, young man,” said he, “if there has not always been some question about the authority of a Second Peter.”

It was immediately after this conversation—the next night—that he preached this sermon on “The Blind Boy.” The storekeeper told him at the close of the service that the evangelist had made other arrangements.

Lovingly,
THOMAS.

II

THE BLIND BOY

THE lad whose story has been told in the lesson read holds a remarkable place among Christian people. His conversion was well-nigh instantaneous: one moment the appeal, the next the acceptance of that appeal; one moment a simple question, the next a most fitting answer; one moment the quickened curiosity of a stranger, the next the worship of a new disciple. No time apparently was needed. Peter didn't yield as quickly when first under conviction, nor James, nor John, while Nicodemus waited a good part of three years before his stubborn heart was broken by the cries from Calvary. Nor was any exceptional power from heaven needed, as was the case on the day of Pentecost, when thousands heard, heeded, admitted the truth, accepted the Saviour, and joined the Christian church. Without the loss of an hour, and without the call on God for the expenditure of any additional force, this man came through to a sunny and

triumphant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Well do I remember working three years to win one convert, and ten years to win another. Well do I remember the agony of a brother preacher as he confessed to me that he had received neither man, woman, nor child into the church during the past twelve months. I say, this lad holds a remarkable position among Christian converts, and yet it ought to be admitted that the combination of conditions presented in this story is equally remarkable.

He was led to recognize in Christ a well-tried friend. You remember his story. A little while before this, a few hours possibly—a day or two at the most—he was totally blind, unable to see the flowers at his feet, or the stars at night over his head; unable to look into the face of a smiling child; unable to do this, and unable to catch a gleam of hope that it would ever be otherwise. He was blind, blind from his birth, and would have been blind to the day of his death if the Lord Jesus had not passed his way. Standing on the corner of the streets, with outstretched hand and upturned face, whining his piteous plea for a penny,

a desolate beggar, with no past life of interest, and no future of any worth whatever—so far as his companions could see—with a present that offered no ray of sunshine or suggestions of hope, he heard above the murmur of the traffic and the shouts of the children at play the sound of Jesus's name.

A little later that name meant everything to him. Men like him, sinners who have come out of darkness into God's glad daylight, because they too have met the Saviour, sang only a moment ago,

"His name yields the richest perfume,
And sweeter than music his voice."

A little later that name was the sweetest name on earth to him, but not when first he heard it. All that he knew was, it was the name of the man who might possibly help him, by what means he did not know, or for what reason. It was said by the strangers who passed along the way that he had helped others. Possibly, thought the lad, he can help me. Not much of a creed, but enough to make him pray, and when a man prays, something is bound to happen.

All this he was thinking of a day or so later, and of the answer to that prayer, of the anointing with clay, of the trip to the Pool of Siloam, there to bathe his eyes, of the breaking in upon him of the light from heaven, and of the absence of the Unknown Friend, who was the cause of it all. Already the poor boy has had to stand up for him. "He is a sinner," said the Jews. "Whether he is a sinner or no," replied the lad, "I know not. One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see." "We know that God spake unto Moses," said the Jews; "as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is." "Why," said he, in answer, "herein is a marvelous thing that you know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened my eyes. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." Already he has taken the side of Christ against a bitter opposition, though as yet he knows him not. All that he knows is, he is called Jesus, he is from Nazareth, he has done more for him than all the world besides. He has proven himself to be his friend.

As he says this he lifts his eyes and sees the Master standing by him. As he looks

upon him he hears him speak, and as he hears he knows at last that he is face to face with the Unknown Friend, who yesterday gave him the greatest of blessings. Of course he yielded to him. If the Master had asked him to grant some favor that would call for the last atom of energy that he could summon, he would have leaped to give it. I would have done so, you would have done so.

I knew a man once who found his Lord while awaiting the sentence of death in the county jail. He found the Lord, and also a little later found his freedom. From the day the prison doors closed behind him, to the day of his death, he lived for Christ, he spoke of him; he sought out his friends, the poor, the needy, sinners whom no one else cared for; he gave his time, his money, his prayers, his best of thought; he gave and ever craved that he might give more, all because of an ordinary sinner's sense of common, decent gratitude.

"Do you believe on the Son of God?" said his Friend, and the man knew as he heard him that he wanted him to say that he did. "Do you believe on the Son of

God?" "Who is he?" said the lad. "Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that talketh with thee." And the lad said, "I do believe," and worshiped him. Of course he did. The Son of God, and the Unknown Friend whose heart and hand granted the blessing of sight to a desolate beggar, were one and the same person. Of course he believed on him.

He was sought by Christ himself. Where the disciples were I do not know. It may be at work elsewhere; it may be honestly getting ready to work, or possibly resting after the strain of some strenuous day; or it may be busy over some petty question. "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he is born blind?" said they the day before, when they saw the lad for the first time. Great question that! Mighty interesting! Just the sort of a question that would stir up some of the men I know.

Why, I once had a Bible class in a church where I was pastor that these disciples would have delighted in. All sorts and conditions of men came to that class, and all sorts and conditions of questions were asked. Some of them were good, some of

them were absolutely no good; some of them had a bit of reference to the lesson of the day, some were as far away from it as many a sermon is from its text. But of them all, none stirred the interest of the class as did the questions that had to do with topics that even the angels of God dare not consider. No matter where the leader would start, before he was through some smart sinner had led the rest of them into the garden of Gethsemane, or Paul's third heaven, or the council chamber of God before the fall. A favorite attempt of a man who could not rule his own children, or plan wisely enough to keep himself straight from one revival season to another, was to justify the ways of God with man! One day that class appointed a committee to look after the absentees. The brother who thought he saw flaws in the plan of salvation was selected as chairman. The first man they went for was a humble fellow who had attended the class only three times. "Do you ask me why I do not come again?" said he. "That's easy to answer. Why don't you ask me something hard? Why don't you try to find out why

I came as often as I did?" Once should have been a great sufficiency.

Where the disciples were I do not know. All that I can say is, they missed a big opportunity. But not the Master; he was the busiest man in that city; he had no time to eat, no time to sleep, no time for prayer, except he caught it during the hours of darkness. He was bearing the burdens of a world of sin, was working out the problem of redemption, was ever listening to the voice of God, and ever repeating the matchless words of comfort which he heard. Well might he have said to some delegation from Galilee offering to him an audience of five thousand eager listeners, "I can't come." Well might he have refused a Gentile world, or even the chosen people, that he might talk with God about the next step to be taken. Well might he have done so, but he never did. One sinner who needed him offered an audience big enough to get from him his best. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," said he to the disciples, when they found him aglow with his conversation with the woman at the well. "God so loved the world, that he

gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," said he to Nicodemus—the best of his messages to an audience of one.

Why, I know men who give a prayer meeting talk, as they call it, to a score of saints who brave a winter's storm in coming to church, that they may keep the sermon they have struggled over for a more representative gathering! Our Lord gave to an audience of one, to a man who crowded in upon him by night—a coward who waited till the death on Calvary before he dared to come out into the open—our Lord gave to him the greatest sentence ever spoken.

So it was he who found the blind boy. What a scene! Would to God I could bring it to you as I see it to-night! Matthew's King, Mark's Ideal Man, Luke's Great Heart, John's Son of God, full of grace and truth—the King of kings and the Lord of lords—speaking to a nameless beggar about saving faith! What a scene! Win? Of course he won. Never man spake like that man, never man looked like him—

sublimity, sincerity, simplicity, strength commingled with tenderness, power that could swing a world through space in a hand whose delicate touch could bind up a broken heart. Of course he won. Peter could have won with the record of that blind boy's recent history to back him up. Thomas could have appeared an ardent advocate of simple, child-like faith. Judas, though asking as a return the pennies still left from the boy's days of beggary—even Judas could have won. Any man could have won that boy if he'd had the sense to join yesterday's blessing with to-day's appeal. Surely the Master could win, and did.

He was found in the hour of his need. For some reason that I cannot fully understand the church people had turned against him. Years ago I knew a man who was a veteran of the Mexican War. He was poor and old, a humble saint fighting the tendency to be a desperate sinner. He had the curse of the appetite for drink upon him. He had it and couldn't get rid of it. He used to come forward for prayers whenever a good opportunity was offered, till a pastor

who was a stickler for order told him to stay away. Well, one day during the Civil War, when good news came from the front, the poor old fellow lost his hold, and the next the pastor knew—this prim and precise pattern of piety who loved to preach on the exquisite shading of the draperies of the tabernacle and on Easter Day preached on the “Lessons from the Folded Napkins”—the next thing the pastor knew was that the poor fellow was brawling in his drunkenness down at the corner store. Of course, to the mind of that minister there was only one thing to be done: get the saints together, tell the story speedily, and expel the man from the church. There was only one thing to be done, so the saints said; but not so said the sinners. That night, in the barroom of the country tavern, men who never knew the Lord drew up a petition to the Quarterly Conference, respectfully praying that that poor sinner might not be thrown out of the church. “We know when he did not yield,” said they; “you know when he did. We know what the church has been to him; you know what he has not been to the church. We

know what he wanted to be and what he tried to do; you only know what he did. You know where he is now, we know where he will be if you expel him from the church of his fathers and his own better days. We respectfully ask you to go slow." And they did, but not these church people of Jerusalem. They cast the poor boy out because he would not turn against the best Friend man ever knew.

For some reason that I cannot understand at all, his parents turned against him. His father, who should have stood shoulder to shoulder with him, left him to shift for himself. His mother, who should have been the last to think ill of him, preferred her friends in the church to her own boy. I cannot understand it. I haven't enough in the history of my blessed father's family, or in my memory of a noble mother, to give me a basis even for a good Yankee guess. Turn against my boy! Join the crowd that sneers at him or tries to keep him down! Not for the world!

A man whom I buried a few years ago wanted me to preach a sermon at his funeral service on the text, "A man's foes shall be

they of his own household." I told him I wouldn't do so if I could, and couldn't if I would. By the grace of God, I'd have made a colossal failure. I found out afterward that the man himself had turned his eldest son out of doors and told him never to show himself again. That man was too much for me. I can understand the ordinary sinner; I have no difficulty with Jacob' or with Judas; I know all too much of Simon Peter in his weakness; but such a man as that I cannot understand, and I pray the good Lord I never may understand. My boy will find a door that opens at his touch whenever he turns toward home.

No wonder, then, this poor fellow was cast down—cast out and cast down. It was then the Master found him, when any man with a decent idea of the worth of a kindly word and the common sense to use it could have won. Surely the Lord could, and did.

There are times when one word is worth a thousand spoken under other conditions; when one sermon will do more good than a volume of sermons where the need is not felt. This the Master knew.

I made a call once on a crusty old man in my church. I had never come within a thousand miles of his heart before, and indeed doubted if he had one. He would have growled at you if you had wished him good morning, so I never ventured to such an extreme limit of familiarity. His children were afraid of him, and his wife ought to have been afraid, so we all said, though not after that day; at least I never said so, for I saw how the man loved her. He had heard that there was little hope of her recovery from the sickness that led me to take the risk of a call. The doctor had even gone so far as to say that there were possibly only a few hours of life left to her. "I would like a word of prayer with you," said I. "Thank God for that," was the reply. Down on our knees we went, while I talked to God as a man might talk to a friend. That hour? That hour was worth more to me as a pastor of that home than my three years of ministry had been worth, and for some reason I had the good sense to know it.

So the hour when the blind boy was out on the streets, everybody against him, un-

certain where to go and what to do—that hour was worth everything to Jesus Christ, and he knew it. No wonder he won the boy, and bound him to him for time and eternity.

Brethren, this story can be written over and over again. All we have to do is to change the names and dates. Instead of Jerusalem, write Centerville, or Rocky Falls; instead of blind beggar, some well-intentioned sinner well known to you; instead of the third year of our Lord's ministry, the last one down to date. All we need to do is to change a few trivial facts and figures; the great conditions are ever the same

'Tis the Lord Jesus Christ who blessed you in your youth. 'Tis he who gave you the shelter of a mother's heart and father's hand. 'Tis he who granted you every inspiration to live as you ought to live, and every incentive and help. 'Tis God, as Jesus Christ revealed him, who made the sun to shine, the rain to fall, and the flowers to bloom. You are not the maker of your own fortune. 'Tis the Friend of yesterday who makes the appeal to-day. Gratitude

for blessings known and blessings unknown for mercies new every morning and repeated every evening, for gifts and grace akin to the blind boy's gift of sight—these come from Him whom we preach, and gratitude should impel to hearty and spontaneous worship.

And Christ preaches too. Said a quaint old man whom once I knew, when a wise man asked to see a certain preacher who was stirring things, "You cannot see him; he hides behind his Master." Christ preaches too. Never yet did a man live a Christlike life and speak his own word and preach his own sermon. Christ speaks through him. Pentecost makes possible a living Lord, full of grace and truth, present with power to bless and grace to teach and make appeal in every honest, simple soul fully consecrated to him; while the saving grace of common sense, tact, and a fair estimate of the value of things is within reach of most of us. God pity the man if he cannot get it. If he hasn't it I will not vote to renew his license, no matter how much piety he may have. The conditions are the same to-day, and so easily met that God

holds back his blessing if one seeks to advance his cause by magnifying any other. Numbers are not necessary. All Christ needed was an audience of one. He will give no more to his followers to-day. 'Tis due to the grace of God that our audiences are small. In less sanctified days they were large. Great preaching is not necessary; good talking is. Conversation makes converts. Sincerity and alert, tactful sympathy in the face of a man whose life is hid with Christ in God tell tremendously.

I want no evangelist here. I want you. I beg each one of you to get busy immediately, to speak of the Friend of sinners, to present him in the spirit of prayer, so that he have power to speak through you, and to be active where common sense tells you your testimony is needed. Then will many a man hear the question, "Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?" and gladly give the answer, "I do."

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III
THE PRODIGAL
OR
THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE MERRY-
MAKING IN THE OLD HOME

"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."—Luke 15. 32.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER

Simon Peter has taken a great fancy to a dissipated young fellow who has charge of a logging camp not far from one of the churches on his circuit. One day I told him that this young prodigal was coming out to hear him that evening. I told him also something of his story, for we had become good friends—some of his experiences in the far country, and of his half-formed resolution to go back home to New York to his old father. I am sure that I betrayed no confidence, but I am also sure that Peter sized up the situation from the little that I had told him, so that the young fellow saw himself for once just as he was. I went to the station to see him off the next day. "I'm not sure about the ring and the robe," said he, "but I know I'll find my father waiting for me." Since I know you pretty well, I am sure that he was right. A fellow learns a lot about God from his father, so it seems to me.

Lovingly,

THOMAS.

P. S.—I don't mean his father's sermons.

III

THE PRODIGAL

You cannot tell how a man feels by what he says or what he does. Words are cheap things at their best. Emotions that lie on the surface break into spray. The true depths of a man's soul are hardly known to the master of that soul. One man meets grief with a flood of tears, another with a few dry sobs that seem to shake the very life out of him, another with a note of reckless bravado as he plunges into pitiful gayety. One man hurries away to the church, another to the tavern, and another to his farm.

So is it with joy. It's just as hard to find out how happy a man is as to find out how sad he is. You can tell how this father looked, and you can tell what he did. You can see his face light up with joy as he recognizes his boy turning in from the dusty road at the end of the long lane; you can see the heartiness of welcome as he sends off his servant for the ring and the

robe. You can follow them up to the house, and hear everything that is said, but even then you cannot tell the depth of that old man's joy. You have got to live with him in imagination through the long years of his boy's absence. You have got to see his grief, its causes and effects. You have got to see how sad he has been to know how glad he is, now that the boy has at last come home.

You must remember that this old man had lost that which by no possibility could be replaced. The coin that the woman had lost, the sheep that had strayed from the fold, the objects of search in the two stories that are told alongside of this one—these could easily be replaced; but not the boy.

He has his own individuality. No one looks like him. "Yes, there is a family resemblance," said the father; "that is, strangers tell me there is. I can't see that my younger son looks like his brother, but I suppose he does, for everyone speaks of it." No one acts just like him. His voice could be picked out of all the voices in the family group in the glad days when all were

home together. The father knew immediately at night, when startled out of a sound sleep, just which child had called him in a troubled dream. "I can tell his step on the path away down by the gate," says the mother, and the father doesn't think it strange. The old man even goes so far as to say that his boy has his own peculiar method of thought and manner of expression. "That's pretty near the way my boy would have said it," he remarked to a neighbor one day in a moment of confidence. "That is," added he, "as near as anyone could come to it. Why, sir, you ought to have heard what they said about him in his school; you ought to have heard some of the questions he asked me; I never saw anyone just like him." He is the center of many a memory. Take him out, and that man's past is ruined—as much a wreck as the arch on that bridge those city folks built down by the mill would be if you'd take the keystone away. Take that boy out of the father's life for the last thirty years or so, and the man would be a raving maniac.

So, he is the center of many a hope. I

took a ride a few years ago with a friend of mine one bright afternoon out into the country. We came to a beautiful piece of farm land, a gentle hill, a fertile valley, a stretch of forest, a bit of a stream singing its way along in the sunshine. "Just the place," said I, "for a good man's home." "You think so?" said my friend. "Why, yes," said I, "Mother Nature smiles here, contented neighbors are within easy reach, and there's the spire of the village church shining through the trees. What more do you want?" "Just what I thought," said he, heartily, "I've bought it." "Bought it?" said I; "what for? What do' you want of another place, when you've got a corner lot in Eden now?" "Bought it for my little girl," said he. "Twenty-five or thirty years from now this will be very valuable—just the place for her to have for a home; something to make her think of the old man when he's dead and gone." A good man's child is the center of nine tenths of his hopes. Ambitions that are personal die when your child is born.

I say, friends, no one could replace that younger son in the old man's heart and

home. We must remember this, that we may see how sad he had been. We may then understand what he meant when he said a little later, "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad."

You must remember, too, that this old man had lost that which by no possibility could be sought after. The coin could be. The woman who had lost it knew that it was somewhere in the house, and swept the room it may be a dozen times, all the while knowing that at some swing of the broom it must be brought to light. "It's here," said she, "I know it's here." The silly sheep could be sought. It would go straight for good pasturage—that the shepherd knew, and he is a poor sort of a shepherd who does not know where the still waters and the green pastures may be found. The coin and the sheep could be sought, but not the son, for the far country is a broad country.

I saw a notice tacked up in the post office down at the Corners a month or so ago. It read something like this: "If this notice catches the eye of our boy Charles, let him know that we forgive him and are ready to

welcome him home again." The names of two broken-hearted parents were signed to the paper. The postmaster told me that that notice had been sent to every town in the State, with the request, the pitiful request, from the saddened father, that it be given publicity. All that the father could do was to sit at home and wait, or it may be to think of some new scheme of as little value as the pathetic note you and I saw tacked up alongside of the announcement of the county fair. The far country is a broad country, yes, and the freedom of one's choice is broad too; it knows no law nor limit. At times the father thinks the boy must come home. He remembers his impulsive goodness. He tells a story, let us say, of a sudden decision for good well-nigh spontaneous. "Why, sir, he dashed through the flames without thought of danger and saved that little child of whom I spoke to you." But before he can get much comfort out of that he remembers his impulsive meanness—how he ripped out an oath one day against his own mother. One day mighty good, the next day mighty mean. One day a saint with a halo, the

next a sinner with a devilish leer. "Is he a saint to-day or a sinner?" the old man asks many a time. "In the broad field of choice, where my boy roams at will, does he stoop to straighten a bruised reed, or kill a sparrow that under our Father's notice has fallen to the ground? Sides he with God or with the devil?" He cannot say.

The far country of imagination and decision is as broad as the wide world with its hundreds of cities and towns, where the lad may cast his lot; therefore the old man waits. For him there is no relief through a change of scene.

"For thirty-eight years," said an old woman to me some time ago, "I have been waiting for my boy to come home. Every time I hear a knock at the door I think that may be he has come. Every time I waken in the morning I say, 'This may be the great day I have looked for.'" And all that time for nearly forty years that poor old soul had kept the home just as the boy had left it.

So there is no relief through activity. Years ago one night a man I loved, a car-

penter, was arrested on a fearful charge proven afterward, years afterward, to be cruelly false. I remember something of that day—not as much as I wish I could; but among the memories is the recollection of the pain I knew when I saw that I could do absolutely nothing. Could I have fought a fight, or run a race, or tackled a burden, or braved a winter's storm, or gone on some far errand through the darkest of nights, it would have been bearable. But to sit still, to wait, to watch, to do nothing, God alone knows what that was to a man such as I am.

So I guess it was with this father. He would gladly have gone anywhere to hunt for his boy, but what good would it do? One day he did go away for a few hours. He heard of a poor stranger who had died in a neighboring village, and he went to see if it could be the boy he loved. When he returned from his fruitless search he learned of a poor wreck of a man who had lingered for a few moments in apparent uncertainty down by the gate, who acted as if he would come in, but who had then gone on. Do you know that man never got over the fear that the stranger at the

gate might have been his son? Do you know that he said to himself, "I'll not leave the old home again so long as I live, for fear that my boy may come back and not find me waiting to greet him"? "That's what I said," said a man to me, who gave me this bit out of his own life; "that's what I did," and I wonder if this grand old father of the sweetest story ever told didn't say and do the same.

This isn't all. You must remember that the father had lost that which suffered day by day with increasing pain. The coin is a bit of metal, with no life, not even the lowest, therefore no capacity for pain or pleasure. The sheep is a silly brute, with no desire higher than to get food for itself. The boy is a human being, made by God in his own image, with a heart deep enough to hold secrets that no man can fathom, big enough to give room to the Spirit of God, tender enough to cringe under the careless touch of even a baby's fingers, and quick enough to suffer ceaseless pain. Such was the heart of the father, and such was the heart of the son. O, I know that for a time the pain may be ignored, and the poor fool,

before he and his money have parted, may think that he is enjoying life. I know that prodigals, from the days of our Lord, have all sung the same song, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." I know that sinners think they are free from sorrow, that they are merry, but they are not. A boy going to sin from such a home as this good old father offered hates to be alone, for when alone he has to think; hates to meet his past, for when he does so he has to think; hates to look into the future, for when he does so he has to think. He hates to think, for when he thinks he suffers pain. 'Tisn't long before he finds that the world is no true friend to him. If he go to it with his sorrow it will give him a curse. It will take his money and give him nothing in return. This poor boy would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him.

A man told me the other day of a poor wreck of a fellow who drifted in to one of the little meetings in a rescue hall in one of our big cities. He had evidently just come from feeding the swine of a citizen of the far country. He was down and out, as

near the limit of utter worthlessness as a man this side of the judgment could be. He came into the meeting to get warm, to find a shelter for an hour or so from the fury of a winter's storm. So he said in his testimony when first they got him to his feet. A little later he said that God had sent him there. Under the preaching of a simple sermon, or the singing of a sweet gospel song, or the prompting of the tireless angel of God who had never left him, he sprang to his feet, "O, God," said he, "you saved Sam Hadley, and Jerry McAuley, and many a poor fellow like them, why in . . ."—even in a pulpit that speaks plainly of a hell and a heaven, I ought not to name the place that poor fellow referred to—"why don't you save me?" and then he fell on his face and sobbed as if his heart would break. "Thank God for his pain!" said the man who was leading the meeting. "Thank God it hurts! The devil will rend him sore, but will come out of him." And he did, and Jesus took the poor fellow by the hand and lifted him up and he arose. Pain! Pain! Of course he suffered pain. He was under the tug and pull of two contending forces,

the one pulling toward God and heaven,
the other toward eternal hell.

I saw a man tightening the strings of his violin the other night, up at the town hall. At every turn, as the string got the tighter, I could hear it shriek and wail in its anguish; I couldn't stand it. Folks thought that I left to get away from the discord. I did; but the discord was in the chamber of a soul that I had to think of when I heard the cry of that violin. I couldn't help thinking of the tightening of the strings of the heart of the man I had talked to up at the logging camp that afternoon.

I say, friends, this old man sitting by the door looking down the familiar path to the gate is thinking of a boy who suffered pain yesterday, who suffers more to-day, and who will suffer even more to-morrow—thinking of a heart that shrieks discordant notes when it might under the touch of the Master, who would pay a princely sum for it, give forth the sweetest music.

Is it to be wondered at that the father turned to the elder son and said, "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is

alive again; and was lost, and is found"? Meet! Of course it was meet. He couldn't help being happy.

Would to God that some of you men might make possible a modern Yankee version of this old story! Would to God some man here might go home to the old folks with the note of penitence of the prodigal! Would to God that some of you men who are out in sin would come to yourselves! If you did you would gladden many a heart, and if you did you would find a welcome on the part of your Father in heaven akin to this, only surpassing it in ways not even a story can suggest. There is joy in the heart of God the Father over one sinning boy who comes back in his rags to the innocent home of his youth. God help you to get up and move!

IV
SIMON OF CYRENE
OR
THE PREACHER WITH A HARD TASK

**"And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon
by name: him they compelled to bear his cross."—Matt. 27. 32.**

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

Sermon preached at a District Conference. There were thirty or more preachers present, most of them young men, a few of them recent graduates from the seminary.

One of these graduates had presented an essay on the "Hardships of the Ministry." I do not think that Peter would have been bothered about it if the Conference had not practically unanimously requested its author to secure, if possible, its publication in one of our church papers. Simon had freedom.

Lovingly,

THOMAS.

P. S.—I don't think you'll see that paper on hardships. It was no good. When I heard Simon I was proud that my father was a preacher.

IV

SIMON OF CYRENE

EVERY now and then I meet men who think that they have a hard lot in life. Their hours are too long, their wages are too small, their opportunities are too limited, their sacrifices—their word, not mine—are unrecognized or unrewarded. I meet them everywhere, even in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. “If I had my life to live over again,” said a reckless old preacher once to a group of younger brethren at one of our Conferences, “I would not enter the ministry. It’s too hard a life; too big a strain; there is no let up; fifty-two weeks in the year; seven days and seven nights in the week.” I’ll not tell you his name; his last appointment, if I mistake not, was Cyrene, North Africa.

He had just come to Jerusalem—or rather Simon had—a man wonderfully like him in temper and opinion, nineteen hundred years ago. Why he came I cannot tell, nor what he thought of the Man from Naza-

reth who was the central figure at the great feast. I only know that he was called upon to do a bit of hard work while there decidedly against his will. The hand of a Roman soldier fell heavily on him, and forced him to carry the cross of Christ along the dusty, toilsome way up the slope of Cavalry. He was compelled to take up the cross, and he thought his lot was hard!

Yet he ought to have known that the burden was a tribute to his strength. Men do not ask a child to lift a hundred-pound weight, nor put a load on the shrinking shoulders of tottering old age. They find a man of vigor and vitality, with broad shoulders and good red blood, and give the task to him. They do not ask the drummer boy to be the color sergeant, nor the man wounded in the last engagement, nor the raw recruit from the shops or the stores, large in patriotism but little in physical strength. They select the man whose muscles are hard, whose frame is well knit together, who has a record at the tug or the strain or the lift of life. "I took it as a compliment," said a young man in the group who heard the old preacher bemoan his lot,

“I felt proud when the bishop sent me off to a hard place. Possibly it was because I was young, coloring fact with the tints of fancy. It may be that I did not know any better, but I went to my work rejoicing in the thought that good critics considered that I was able to strike a hard blow, stand a severe strain, and lift for the Lord a heavy burden. Fact, sir, I think it would have been a heavier burden to bear to have had no cross at all.” The truth of it is, most of us are prouder of our strength than anything else, and quite willing to forgive the man who may either overestimate it or overtax it.

Of course, Simon's position had something to do with his selection. He happened to be standing just where our Lord stumbled or fell, or where for the first time the Roman soldiers fully noticed the deadly strain the weight of the cross was making on his exhausted vitality, or his interest may have had something to do with it. There is sympathy in his face, or cruel vindictiveness, or cold indifference. Even a Roman soldier is human, and, other things being equal, will be influenced by some trivial

thing. "If he feels that way," I think I hear the Roman centurion saying to himself, "I'll give him a chance to taste some new emotions." His position or his interest may have had something to do with his burden, as undoubtedly they have to-day; yet it was his strength that was the determining factor.

I have a friend in a town not far away who is the village doctor. I was stopping overnight a few months ago in his home. It was a bitter night in winter. The storm had been gathering strength throughout an angry, desolate day. The snow was deep; I could barely make my way through the drifts to the barn. The night was moonless and starless and hopeless. I was aroused at midnight by a knock at the outside door. I heard some one grope his way through the hall, open the door, bid a man enter, and lead the way back to the kitchen fire. A few moments later I heard both of them go out, and then the creaking of the runners of the sleigh on the frozen ground, and the nervous shout of a stranger's voice as he turned his wearied horse toward home. "Did you get there in time?" I said to the doctor the next morning. "Yes, but a half

hour later would have been too late.” “Were you the nearest physician to his home?” said I. “Couldn’t he have found some one without going five miles to get him?” “Yes,” said the doctor, answering my second question, “but for some strange reason he preferred me. He was simple enough to think that I was the only one to do the work.”

I introduced my friend, the young preacher who loved a hard job, to this doctor the first chance I got. I knew they had much in common. “Pay,” said that preacher to me one day; “salary! Why, if I had only myself to look out for I’d work for nothing, and then be the best paid man in town.” To have a man to come to you as that poor fellow came to the doctor, and say that you are the only one qualified to help him; to have a man think that you are the only one who will not throw a stone though you stand on a pebbly beach; that you will give liberally, and upbraid not, is to have the highest tribute paid to piety or power of any kind. My friend the doctor never sent in a bill to that farmer. He would have done so if he had not seen how poor he was; yet

he told me he was glad he could not do it, for he got his pay when he heard the man's story down at the door. Simon might have taken the cross and rejoiced in it, as a tribute to his strength.

The cross was the making of him. He had two boys, Alexander and Rufus. Luke speaks of Alexander in his story of the deeds of the apostles, and Paul refers to Rufus in his letter to the Romans. It's safe to say that in later life these two boys became fairly well known Christian men. If so, it's likely their father became a Christian too, and if so, this journey up the hill of Calvary, this sweating under the cross, as the crowds jeer and curse, had much to do with it. All this is possible. My knowledge of the Simon of Cyrene whom I meet occasionally as I go from town to town to-day, and my sense of the power of Christ over one who walks with him for only a few steps of the way, make me think it to be probable. I am sure that the cross made his reputation. He never would have been heard of, nor Cyrene either, if he had not carried it. I am quite persuaded it made his character too.

I know that it does in our time. It sobers one as nothing else can do. If too heavy, it presses all elements of song out of his soul; if too light, it tempts him to play the fool, but if correctly measured to meet his breadth of shoulders and strength of bone, sinew, and muscle, it makes a man of him. Frivolity goes, the sense of responsibility comes. The youth who could toy with a bauble or dream of sensuous ease is no more; a man of deed and daring and work worth while has taken his place. It is the burden that has done it. 'Tis well-nigh inevitable.

I buried a man once who had been in thirty kinds of business during his long life. It is needless to say that I buried him from the town farm. Of course he died in the poorhouse. He tried too many things, he gave close attention to none. It would have been a blessing if some one had strapped a burden on his shoulders and made him carry it until he knew its weight, and his fitness to tackle it.

It was the mercy of God that Simon could not shake off that cross five minutes after he took it. It held his attention until

it made him. Not an atom of his strength remained unused, for he took the place of the strongest man in Jerusalem. Our Lord was perfection in physical force and beauty, as well as mental depth, grasp of truth, and sincerity of magnificent motive. He could lift any load that any man could lift. None could surpass him. I love to think that physically none could equal him. It was the burden that nearly broke him down—wearied and straitened as he was with his cares and perplexities, dizzy from the need of sleep, drained of his magnetism by every poor sufferer who could get through the throng, even to touch the hem of his garment—it was his burden that Simon had to carry. Surely he had to call on all of his reserve strength; but it was the making of him.

I once knew a man who was sent to take charge of a church that had broken down two or three stalwart men. It was one of those churches where the pastor has to do everything. It had grown very rapidly. It therefore needed great pastoral watchcare. It was made up largely of young people, and had been accustomed to hear mighty

good preaching. It was in the center of a big city where the poor and the needy have the habit of coming to the pastor with their thousand and one sorrows. To this church this young man was appointed. Why they sent him I never could tell; yet it was the making of him. Powers of which he knew nothing were drawn upon; reserve force kept in check by his ancestors for generations, ready for a sudden call that they never had to give, he was compelled to summon. Not one atom of strength at the end of any one day in the year remained unused. When he got through preaching on Sunday he hadn't an idea left; when he came home from an afternoon of pastoral calling he was exhausted. When he went off for a month's rest he slept two thirds of the time and looked into vacancy the rest of the time. The farmer whose house he stayed in told me that he had hardly spoken a word since he came, and that he seemed to take interest in nothing. One day I met him at the post office. "Are you the preacher here?" said he, coming up to me with a look on his face I never can forget. "Are you interested in men? If so, read that." And as

he spoke he thrust a letter into my hand. It was a reply from a young fellow whom he had written to in the hour of his temptation—a glowing report of victory largely due to the lifeblood with which my friend—for so I was privileged afterward to call him—had written him a timely note of brotherly cheer. “That man uses up more of a soul every day than some of us call into service during a year, more than some of us have,” said I to the farmer who had him in his home. Get busy and read the story of Obed-edom. If a blessing doesn’t come to you, I’ll miss my guess.” Yet it was the burden that he toiled under that made him. Simon of Cyrene ought to have thought of that. Some of you men here might well do the same.

Simon took his burden from the wearied shoulders of another. Do not forget that: not from the ground where heavy stones and masses of masonry may rest for all time, with none of us bothering about moving them; not from the arms of a man better qualified than himself to carry the load, or as well qualified; not from a man tired, as you and I are tired at the end of a

busy day, but from the shoulders of one ready to drop. No matter who the man is, there is something in each one of us that bids us offer our help to one overburdened. "Give it to me," you say; "I'm going your way. Let me help you a bit." If you don't say it you feel condemned, and once more heartily sick of the steady company you have to keep with yourself. If you do you walk for a while as if you were on a wager or making a record. If the man be your friend you feel all the more eager to aid. To meet some one you love climbing up the village hill, carrying a weight that the arms of a woman should never have given to them, to take it from her and carry it home—why, man, that's half the fun of married life. To know that you are the only one whom she would give it to is the other half.

If the man be your Lord and Master—what shall I say of that? I do not know, and if I did and could beautify my speech, or magnify the intensity I trust I put into it, and prolong it until every sinner here had yielded to the claim of Christ—even then I wouldn't say what ought to be said.

To take the cross of Christ! To take it when his heart was almost breaking, and God the Father seemed to have forsaken him! To take it when no one else either offers to do so or is chosen to do so—such indeed is a priceless privilege, to be spoken of through time and eternity. Good men have so considered it, and ever will, even as you and I consider it so to-day.

“Permitted to preach Christ’s gospel for nearly fifty years,” are the words I read a little while ago over the resting place of one of the Lord’s noblemen, a man who came to prominence in his church, but who ever remembered that he was what he was by the grace of God. “Allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel,” said Paul to the Thessalonians. “If God intended you to be a missionary I should not want you to dwindle down into a king,” said an ambassador for God to a young man, standing in Christ’s stead, about to beseech men to be reconciled to him. Hard lot! Steady strain! Seven days and nights in the week! Fifty-two weeks in the year! Yes; but all the while, I would have you remember, you preachers from Cyrene,

that if you do your God-given work you bear a cross taken from the wearied shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God Almighty hates a whiner. He has no use for him in any walk of life—on the farm, at the bench, in the store, and least of all in the pulpit. The church has no use for him either. The man who sighs when he ought to sing, who shirks when he ought to work, who moans over a lot that is not hard until it gets so hard that no man under heaven could do anything with it—that man is superfluous anywhere. He misjudges himself, his neighbors, and his God. He is little, though he thinks himself large; his neighbor is large, though he thinks him little; his work is glorious and worth the toil of the greatest and the best, and he whines because it pays so small a salary! Many an angel in glory, foreordained for all time to sound God's praises, would swap places most willingly with some of you men on some of the hard circuits of Maine. See the size of the volunteer choir on Christmas morning over the plains of Bethlehem. "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the

heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Not a single voice, nor two, nor four, nor a chorus of decent size, but a multitude! Why? Because it was the first chance that the angels had to shout out the truth of redemption's story. All heaven took it, even though the audience was made up of sleepy men who knew precious little of the great deeds doing in Bethlehem, not far away.

"God never gives out his work by the job," I once heard a preacher say, when he learned that a brother minister had retired on his laurels at the age of sixty. "Laurels" is the word he used; the truth is, he retired to a cranberry bog, there to end his days picking berries for a Thanksgiving market. "God never gives out his work by the job." No, he expects a man to keep at it from the day he grants him his commission to the hour when the angels come to carry him home. He expects him to do so, and the man who knows what Simon of Cyrene knew after the agony on Calvary was over rejoices in the opportunity. Forever to receive from Christ,

and never to give to him; eternally to get, and eternally to groan that you may get more; to ask largely that your own pious joy may be full, may suit some of us, but, thank God, it does not suit all. Some of us want to give more than our sins, more than one tenth of what we squeeze out of our competitors at the store, or our workmen on the farm. Some of us want to give a hand to help the hand that was pierced on Calvary; to put a heart over against the soul suffering as we would suffer were it not for the broken heart of Christ; to put our shoulders under a load that otherwise the Lord himself would have to carry unaided. Some of us stand by the wayside, and see the throng moving toward Calvary, and pray, pray, pray, from the time the first murmur of the throng reaches us until the Lord himself is passing by, that the chance may be given to take Christ's cross—not to shun it. Some of us hope to see the centurion put out his hand toward us, for 'tis the highest privilege the average sinner redeemed by Christ can know to make Christ's steps toward Calvary a bit easier for him to take.

V
NICODEMUS
OR
THE DEFENSELESSNESS OF DOUBT

"Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."—John 3. 9-11.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER.**

Sermon preached in the county courthouse. Many lawyers were present, since an important case was attracting the attention of the entire section of the State. Simon was granted permission to preach in the courthouse, since the little church in the town was undergoing repairs. This is the only sermon of all I have sent you thus far that Peter has seen. He has changed it in many places, and has taken out much that enlivened it when given.

Lovingly,
THOMAS.

V

NICODEMUS

ONE of the last men to have conversation with our Lord was a doubter, Thomas, an unfortunate brother absent from the great prayer meeting held in the upper room on the night of the resurrection day, and therefore unable to see truth as others saw it. So one of the first men to meet him was a doubter, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, a man of great prominence among the peculiar people. Doubt at the end of the way, and doubt at the beginning of the way; indeed, we may well believe doubt all along the way, for it is so now.

Men are ever coming to Christ by night, as did Nicodemus; ever fighting their way to light and truth, quite unaided and alone, ever earnest and ever honest, as quick to say we know as we know not. There was doubt at every turn of the Master's way; there ever will be doubt at every turn of the servant's way. 'Tis well, therefore,

for us to know with this old story in mind how the Master met it.

Nicodemus is told very decidedly by Christ that his teaching is neither novel nor peculiar. He is a Pharisee—the Bible student of his day—a ruler of the Jews, a man of age and experience, a master of Israel, a man of thought and good judgment; therefore, he should have known that the teaching of Christ was in full harmony with all that history and godly experience, as well as revelation through the centuries, had shown the chosen people. “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” is our Lord’s reply to his doubt concerning the fact of the new birth. Can it be that thou hast read and seen and heard and found out from personal experience what every wise man among us should know, and can turn to what I say as if to something new or strange?

The teaching of Christ is largely the teaching of the Old Testament; so Christ thought and said. “I came not to destroy,” said he, indignantly, “but to fulfill.” “Moses wrote of me.” The New Testament can be found in the Old, as a flower of sweetest

fragrance and matchless bloom may be found tightly rolled away in the rosebud that the God of nature sees fit to open some rare day in June. The child says to his playmate, "Let that bud alone; 'twill bloom in a week." The master of Israel says to his fellow students, "Let this old record alone; 'twill give way to a better one if you let God have his course with it." The master of Israel who sees things as Nicodemus ought to have seen them can find little that is peculiar in the teachings of Christ.

I once knew a man who groaned over the mistakes of Moses, and wept over the crudities of Joshua and Jonah; who complimented our Lord on the Sermon on the Mount, though he thought Matthew might have given a better literary finish to his report of it! I once saw that man turn to the Bible to find a passage in Isaiah. I had heard him dwell with pathos on the sad obscurity of the noble man whom the critics called the second Isaiah, and I thought as I saw him start to look up the passage, Surely it must pain his great soul to read these noble words of the man who has gone down into history unhonored and

unknown. I saw him hunt for Isaiah through the pages of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, then over in the company of Hosea and Amos! In desperation he took a furtive glance through the writings of Paul. When he saw that he couldn't find it there, he casually opened to the table of contents, and asked once more for the passage to be named. A humble brother who never said anything had by this time put a Bible in his hands opened at the word sought for. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" "Not to some of us," snorted a rough old sinner, who had watched our learned critic; "some of us do not know as much as we pretend to know." I think I knew what he had in mind, therefore I was somewhat relieved when a sweet old sister suggested that one of the windows be lowered. "Are you warm too?" growled the sinner. "Yes," said the dear old soul, "it seems to me a trifle close." The committee on absentees, two or three weeks later, reported that our critic had gone to another church where the teaching was more in accord with the spirit of the times. "What times?" said

the pastor, mildly, and the class gathered from the quick look of recognition that he gave the old sinner on the rear seat that he was not thinking of the twentieth century—no, nor of the nineteenth, nor the eighteenth, but of a century somewhere back in the dark ages, when Pharisaism was at a premium.

The man who studies the past as Nicodemus should have studied it, who knows anything of the laws of seedtime and harvest, even in the world of nature—"First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear"; who admits that the sun never leaps from midnight to afternoon, but climbs his way forward through twilight to dawn, through dawn to the daylight of the long shadows, through daylight to dazzling noon—that man sees little peculiar in the teachings of Jesus Christ, little that is not implied in the songs or psalms or visions of the men who preceded him. He judges the past by standards that befit the past; he judges from what is not said as well as what is said; from the reading of motive rather than achievement, of prayers rather than profession; the darkness and difficulty

under which virtue makes a painful progress forward, as well as the distance covered. He reads the Old Testament as the master of Israel ought to read it, and finds it to be incomplete without the New. "To the Word," I say to the man who doubts—"to the Word of God." If any man will do God's will, he will know of Christ's teaching that it is of God, and he will see that the message of his Son is the flower and fruit of the plant God has cared for from the day it broke through the soil of Genesis to the day when it shaped itself into the bursting bud of Isaiah. If the farmer thinks the apple he holds in his hand to be a peculiar fruit, though he remembers well the fragrant blossoms he carried on the broken bough from the tree that bore it, Nicodemus need well be surprised at the teaching of Christ. If he does not, neither need Nicodemus.

Again, Nicodemus is told very decidedly that the mysterious element in Christ's teaching cannot in any fairness be held against it. Granted that there are some points of peculiarity, some things comparatively new; granted that they are so new as

to be enveloped in mystery—even this fact should not weaken its claim. There are mysteries everywhere. Nature has her secrets that no man can discover. As our Lord and Nicodemus linger late into the night in most memorable conversation, they hear the wind whistling down the street. “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” said Christ, “and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” There’s a mystery in the storm of the night. You know not where it arose, what path it has taken on its way to the home in which you sit; you know not where it will fall away exhausted, and sink down to positive calm. Of the winds of night you know nothing, and yet accept them as facts, and hurry as evening falls to get under shelter. There are mysteries everywhere.

The rosebud I was speaking of a few moments ago; the lily that sheds its fragrance on Easter Day as we come together to commemorate our Lord’s resurrection; the holly berries that give a brilliancy to the Christmas wreath that hangs in your

window; the green wreath itself; the pure and spotless snow, as white as the innocence of the sweet little girl who lisped your name in her evening prayer—all these are mysteries to me. Under what laws did they move forward in the selection of their color and fragrance. Who gave them that delicacy of form? Who gave them their matchless beauty? “I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Mysteries everywhere at all times of the year, in the heavens above you, in the flowers at your feet, in seedtime, summer, harvest, and winter.

I was on my way one night last winter to lead a meeting in the schoolhouse at Flat Rock. When I came in from the storm I was covered with snow from head to foot. Every flake was a gem, so brilliant and so delicate that I called to a young man who was standing by the stove and said: “Do you wonder that the Lord turned to Job in the hour of his depression with the words, ‘Hast thou entered into the beauties of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?’ Do you wonder that God asks man to go slow in his criticism of great

plans and purposes, known to God alone, to ripen, it may be, when the last great saint has learned his greatest lesson at some decisive moment in a nation's history out of the record of the suffering of the perfect and upright man in the land of Uz? Do you wonder that God asks him to explain the secrets and beauties of the dust of the frozen North before he dares move forward to greater mysteries?" "No," said the young man, "I do not"; and as he spoke, I saw that I was face to face with another mystery. Why had I spoken to him? Why had I thought of Job and suffering and God's great purposes, and not, rather, of the chill of the night or the glow of the fire, or the chit-chat of cordial welcome? Why had I sent out the one question that the man needed to hear? He was a stranger to me—a man from the city, worn out and wearied with cares and perplexities, resting for a few weeks, under the physician's advice, among the friends of his family a generation ago. Some influence had prompted him to come to that simple service; some influence had prompted me to speak to him; some influence led me to

select a hymn I had not used for years, yet associated, as I afterward learned, with that man's hours of serious thought; some influence led me to preach from the greatest promise our Lord ever gave, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Some influence? Yes, but what, or, better, who? When you can answer that question, tell me how He made known to me his desires, or what words he used in telling the young man to come to the schoolhouse that night through a winter's storm to hear a simple message of salvation. When you answer that, tell me what led the man to agree to come. He had refused before, under favorable conditions, appeals almost without number; yet now readily assents.

Nature has its mysteries, so has the mind of man. Indeed, I can more easily explain the fragrant rose than I can the reason why I should like it. I can more easily account for the lily of the field than the mind of Him who saw in it a beauty surpassing the splendor of King Solomon, or why he saw what he did. Yet I trust my memory, and have confidence in the words

of my neighbor, and know that I am understood by my loved ones, even though I may not speak a word. There are mysteries everywhere—in the flower of the field, in the mind of a child, in life itself. Why some of you men linger on here beyond your years of usefulness, tottering along the brink of the grave, and others go in the flush of youth or vigor of maturity, I do not know. Why we ever came here, I know no better. Where smile the fields and flow the streams that we are to know in the home that eager hearts expect, I cannot say. Years ago I gave over talking about the mystery of death, for I am face to face daily with a greater one, the mystery of life. Why we are and why we are what we are perplexes any one of us who looks at life as a master of Israel should.

Not far from here is a home in which there are two sons; one of them is like his father, the other unlike father or mother. It is said he resembles most remarkably his mother's father's father. Why? God alone knows. Whether the soul is created at the birth of a child by the direct work of

Him who could call life from nothing, or whether it be the development of a germ taken from the soul of the parents, or whether the truth of life and personality lies somewhere between these extremes, some day we may know—some day in the never-ending eternity, the other side the grave; and yet there are men by the name of Nicodemus who hesitate to accept a statement concerning the new birth because it has in it the element of mystery. Surely, in all honesty, the fact of its mystery cannot be held against it. Deal with great truth, you men who pride yourselves on your candor, at least as fairly as you do with little truth. Allow a mystery to cling to the birth of a soul, since you grant it to the birth of the body. Allow the coming of the Spirit of God to be known only to him, since you grant it to the sweep of the trackless wind up from the sea to the shaking hut in which you pass a sleepless night. Surely, the fact that there is a bit of mystery in the teaching of Christ should not be held against it.

One would think that this would be enough. Not so. After our Lord had

told Nicodemus that there is little peculiar in his teaching; after he had told him that of the elements that are unique that which is mysterious might well be expected; after his call to a calm review of what he knew and did not know; after argument, he turns to authority. He tells Nicodemus that he himself is well assured of the truth of his teaching, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." If there be mystery it should be expected. Still, if the mystery seem too great, remember that I am telling you what I myself have tested. When, I do not know. How he knew, I cannot say. Why he should be so sure of this, and at times be uncertain of other truths, I am at a loss to understand. What he knew through personal consciousness, what through study, and what through direct revelation from heaven, I cannot determine. All I know is, He who said at one time, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" and at another time, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, neither the Son, but the Father"—he turns to Nicodemus, with ringing tones of certainty, and says,

“We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.”

Behind the words of Christ is the authority of the perfect life, perfect in honesty, ability, far-away vision, and deepest insight into truth. On his teaching Nicodemus may well rest.

So, I turn to the man who doubts, and bid him read more carefully two or three books—one, the Word of God written in the old volume that gathers dust in many a home; another, the Word of God written on the fields and forces of nature about us; another, the Word of God written in the life of Him who spake as never man spake. To the Bible, man, to nature, to Christ. Surely, if you are a master of Israel, you must do this. 'Tis the only course that can be taken by one of age, experience, and sincerity. I have no fear as to the glorious outcome. Nicodemus, who will do at noon and in public what he did at night when alone with Christ, will see the truth of Christ everywhere.

VI
JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA
OR
THE SECRET DISCIPLE

"And after this Joseph of Arimathæa, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus."—John 19. 38.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

Of course there are very few men in this region who have had the advantages of the schools—I mean the higher schools. I have met only two men who have taken a college course. One of the two is a physician—a man of marked ability and of strong character. “He is a better man than he pretends to be,” said Peter to me the other day. “I heard of his reading the fourteenth of John to a dear old woman up on the West Mountain.”

Evidently Peter has had him much in mind lately—though I cannot quite account for his intensity when he preached this sermon, for the doctor was not present.

Lovingly,

THOMAS.

VI

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA

I WAS called to attend the funeral a few weeks ago, in a town not many miles from here, of a man who made me think of Joseph of Arimathæa. At the head of the casket there was a profusion of flowers—clusters and wreaths and columns and crosses, and all sorts of pious combinations from kinsfolk few or many degrees removed. Among them was a creation called by the florist “The Gates Ajar.” That there might be no mistake as to the message in the flowers, the same idea was given in a selection by a quartet said to be the “favorite of our brother lately deceased.” I suppose that the friends who arranged for the flowers and the song intended to convey the impression that the one they mourned had at last just managed to get into heaven—taken the kingdom of God by violence, forced the doors open, crowded his way past a reluctant porter. I suppose that they would intimate that he knew nothing of the en-

SIMON PETER, SHEPHERD

trance that Peter says may be unto one abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Christ." Whether they intended this or not I cannot say. I know thought that the selections were appropriate. The man had made a great sacrifice of his faith for the first time death bed. For years he had been a "disciple of the Lord secretly from the Jews," as it were, and at the last come to beg for his dead body, in the light and love of his life.

The motive of the secret discipline, is not a good one. Joseph kept the rule, because he was afraid to face the consequences. For months fear had controlled him—fear, the most ignoble and detestable of motives. Through it he lost his chance to learn from the greatest of teachers. He said that he afterward carried to England the cup used at the Last Supper—the "Grail," that he cherished it because it was the sacred hands of his Lord had hallowed for all time. The tradition may be true, but if it is, 'tis pitiably sad. Nothing but an empty cup! When he rose to speak

the wild men to whom in the last year of his life he went, he had no word that the Lord had told him, no comment on man's life of sin and sorrow suggested by some well-remembered conversation with Christ, no gleam of the gospel not caught by the evangelists—nothing of his own—nothing but an empty cup.

Through fear he lost his chance to lead, for the Twelve were but average men. The fact that eleven of them came from one little province; that five or six of them were selected at one time out of an ordinary crowd; that up to the time that our Lord met them they had been content to catch fish by night and to mend nets by day; that the power of Pentecost could not make Peter even preach a sermon that Luke could find any life in when he came to report it—these facts show what the apostles must have been.

Surely a man like Joseph, had he stood out publicly for Christ, could have come to the front in such a company. He was of good birth, good blood, good position, and had the wealth to have modified one of the most pathetic sayings of his Lord—"The

Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He might have led, if he hadn't taken counsel with his fears and determined down deep in his soul to remain a secret disciple.

I say his motive was a mean one; just as mean—though I make a large admission when I say it—as the motive of many secret disciples whom I meet to-day. They are disciples secretly for fear of the consequences of an open confession—afraid of a sneer, a call to sacrifice, a drain upon their sympathy or secret bank account. "What under heaven are you living for?" said I one day to a man of fifty years of age who was making money fast but doing nothing with it. "The good Lord died for you, and his church needs you to help a bit in return." We were coming back from a little service I had held in a union chapel five miles from home. My friend had a good span of horses and had volunteered to drive me over to my afternoon appointment. "The church needs you, and needs you now. It can get along very well without your company if you come for the first time in your old age, crawling up the steps with your

wounds and your whine, a wretched wreck of humanity, begging that the gates of heaven be kept open until you can crowd through. Its class of penitent thieves is full to overflowing—and I guess there is a long waiting list, too. It needs you now, when you are in the full vigor of manhood, when you can lift a heavy burden, work two days and a night on a stretch, and then catch up after a good seven hours' sleep; when you sing because you can't help it; when you laugh at an old story as if it were a new one, just because there's laughter in your blood—it needs you now. Some men are to pay its expenses; some men are to support its missionaries; some men are to endure for the good Lord's sake much that's heard in prayer meeting and a good proportion of the average sermon, too. Why not you? If not, what under heaven are you living for?"

Of course I knew my man, or I wouldn't have spoken as I did. Yet it was the only way to win him. Still, I would have to pass by ninety-nine men out of the next hundred of the unconfessing sinners outside of the church before I could find one

just like him. Nine out of ten—I guess it's too much to say ninety-nine out of a hundred—nine out of ten are cowards, afraid of the man who works by them, of the neighbor across the street, of the loafers in the country store; afraid of the man lower down, whom every one of us of passions and broken promises knows only too well, and afraid of the man higher up, whom every one of us sees himself possibly to be in his moments of sincere prayer; afraid of the devil and afraid of God. Nine out of ten of us have a motive in our secrecy no better than that of Joseph of Arimathæa.

“And yet,” you say to me, “at last he stepped out openly.” True; I can see him coming to Pilate now—God knows I'd give him all that's due him. At the last he came to Pilate like a man and made confession at headquarters; but the time of the confession was pitiably late. It was not at the last; it was after the last. “After this, Joseph besought Pilate.” After the soldiers had driven the nails, and the priests had sharpened and shot their sneers; after the mob drawn from every corner of the world had expended all the fury loaned

it by hell; after the dead could stand it no longer, and Mother Nature had drawn before her eyes the curtain of night to shut from her eyes the death on Calvary—after all this Joseph came out from his hiding. I say, his confession was pitiably late.

Suppose he had spoken only a few hours before—I'll not say days—only a few hours before he did. He would have encouraged for all time the friends of our blessed Lord. These women, for example, who are ever standing by the cross, in our vivid imagination, or hastening to his tomb—these women whose faith, though sure, is shaken, whose hopes are dimmed, whose hearts are well-nigh broken—these women would have hailed him with delight, for the report is whispered from one to the other that of the men one of the Twelve had betrayed him, another had denied him, and the rest had forsaken him and fled. These women who dared to rush into the darkness of the garden, hastening to his tomb guarded by Roman soldiers, are depressed because they missed the men who had rushed out of the garden. He might have encouraged them.

But better, infinitely better, he would have cheered the Master.

There is trembling on the lips of Christ a cry to the God who notes the fall of a sparrow—himself being the witness—that since his day no desolate saint has ever been called to utter. There's a plea for sympathy, a hunger of the soul for something decently human, as the wagging heads and the gossiping tongues of the never-ending procession add bitterness to the cup that he must drink to the dregs. There's a quick recognition of the faith of the penitent thief, so quickly and so gloriously answered as to give to this scene a pathos that no story of friendship can rival. There is all of this; so there's a chance for Joseph to do something for Christ that the tallest archangel in glory might covet.

Well do I remember the time when first I pointed a man on his deathbed to the Saviour. "Pray for me," said the poor fellow, and I prayed, and then I sang the greatest hymn, save one—and that the song over Bethlehem—ever sung by mortal man,

"Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly."

I prayed while I sang, and the dying man prayed too. "O God," said he, and I remember his very words, "take me, if it is not too late, and if it is a little late, help me along the road." "'Tis not too late," I cried, as he fell back exhausted; "'tis not too late. Him that cometh unto God, he will in nowise cast out." I spoke the truth. It was not too late, but within an hour he was dead. Less than sixty minutes in which consciously to turn his face and his heart toward God! Less than sixty minutes of feebleness extreme in which to gather capital with which to begin a never-ending life of activity! Not too late, but painfully too near the limit. The florist might have brought his "Gates Ajar" to that home, and I would have said nothing. To tell the truth, we have talked too much about deathbed repentance, and have magnified beyond all semblance of reason the value of one's dying words. Salvation is not the main thing, but rather salvation in time to be of service. Faith is good, but faith that has time to develop character is infinitely better. A word of truth that can be quoted by the preacher at the close of

his funeral eulogy is all right, but work that calls for time and persistent patience is infinitely better.

Some of the best saints I've known have fallen asleep without a word that could be cut on a tombstone, or printed in the obituary column, or even reported with a pardonable stretch of the imagination to the preacher eager to beautify a paragraph at the emotional period of his address. Time is needed—time as well as trust: time to get down on the street among men and live as a decent citizen who has met his Lord should live; time to remedy certain defects that an enlightened conscience will discover; time to make money to give away; time to get out the plans for your character, as well as to decide on your architect—to get out the plans, at least, if you cannot lay the foundation or clean up the débris. Time, time, time is what most of us want—and that Joseph did not have. He came out into open publicity as a Christian fearfully late.

A word or two as to his reward: It was pitifully poor. All that he could ask for—and he asked for what he didn't get, and

the last thing on earth a man who knows the Lord ought to ask for—was the dead body of the Master. “After this, Joseph besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.” It was not that he might receive from Christ some word of welcome; some lesson regarding God, or duty, or destiny; some vision of the far future; some magnetic touch of the hand from which no power on earth can pluck a friend—not for any of these that he came to Pilate; for such rewards are due to the grace of the living Christ—not the dead one. He came to get the body.

Mind you, had there been nothing greater as a possibility, it would have seemed that there could be nothing greater. Had there been no memory of the days of abundant life, of the messages of matchless worth, of the voice that brought consolation to old age and a charm to little children, the reward would have seemed a large one.

I remember once that I thought that I could get the money together to pay for a trip to the Holy Land. I had loaned a man a couple of hundred dollars a few years before and had unexpectedly received

it back again. For a week I saw the possibility of a bit of travel. Why I had the vision for a week only is another story. For a week I thought of Capernaum and Bethany, Gethsemane and Calvary. For a week I dreamed of the day when I could walk the streets or roam over the hills made sacred by the feet of our blessed Lord. "I am going to spend a night on the sea of Galilee—a night of storm, if I can find one; I am going to pray under the olive trees in an old garden I have read of; I am going up a certain desolate hill that there I may thank God once more for the pardon of my sins." So I said to my brethren in the board meeting when I told them of my plans. To have touched the soil made holy by our Lord's life is no slight privilege.

Joseph's reward, I say, under certain conditions, might have been a good one, but contrasted with the reward that he might have known under conditions that he through cowardice had neglected, most pitifully poor. "Show me the Christ active to-day in New York or London," said a preacher who was with me last summer on a vacation, "rather than the sacred

spots in some sweet Galilee where once he was active." The living Christ is infinitely of more worth—one word from him, one look, the clasp of the hand—than the dead body ready for burial in some new-made grave.

So I think it is with many of the men I meet. They get something if they come to Christ late in life, but not what they might have received. "Go quickly," said Christ, "and tell my disciples that I'm alive." So has he ever been saying. Lose no time: go quickly. Every hour of hesitation or denial is an hour for the lessening of the blessing that is yours for the asking.

So, men, I ask you to come out into the open. 'Tis not an easy thing to live a Christian life; 'tis hard, but 'tis happy; and if not happy—and I've seen saints whose misery I could understand, and whose lament no man could censure—if not happy, 'tis right. Come out into the open, have the courage of your convictions. Redeem the time. Get as much from God as you can, that you may bring to him all the more. Join the friends of our Lord before the death in the gloom.

VII
PETER ON THE SEASHORE OF
GALILEE
OR
CHRIST'S DEALINGS WITH THE FRIEND WHO
HAS LEFT HIM

“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.”—John 21. 17–19.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER

There is a man up here who is a problem. He is a steady subject of conversation in the country store when all other topics fail. He has been living in the village for two or three years, but has never revealed where he came from. He is evidently a man of good education and experience, though he has nothing to do with his neighbors or the affairs of the town. All sorts of guesses have been made, but the strangest of all, that of Simon Peter. He says that he takes him to be a backslidden Methodist preacher.

The sermon I send you with this letter was preached on a night when Peter understood this man was coming to hear him.

If I'd been the fellow aimed at, I would have surrendered before he was half through. As it was, I had to keep up a vigorous thinking.

Lovingly,
THOMAS.

VII

PETER ON THE SEASHORE OF GALILEE

ONLY a few nights ago it was my privilege to talk to some of you of our Lord's attitude toward the "man outside the church"; to-night I would like to speak of the man who has just left it—of the way in which our Lord dealt with an intimate friend of former days who had recently deserted him. I would like to do so for two reasons: first, the opportunity thus given me to go back once more in imagination to Galilee, where some of us at times seem in strange reality to have been; second, the opportunity to learn from the Master himself how to get hold of some of the men whom we meet to-day. For of all the men who need careful handling, and the most sincere and serious treatment, the man who once was a leader, but who now is a deserter, is of first importance.

Just a bit of thoughtlessness or the mere suggestion of indifference or undue severity,

and Peter would have been lost. "I'm going a-fishing," said he, unable to wait any longer—sensitive and sad and a bit suspicious of our Lord's delay. "I might as well give up the whole thing and go back to the only work I can do with any decency. I'm going a-fishing."

Just a bit of carelessness on the part of the man who comes after him, and Peter is gone forever. Just a word of pious cant or pretended fervor or pharisaic self-content—just a bit of ill-considered activity by any one of the six companions who were awaiting the coming of the Master—and he would have been driven away beyond recall.

"We'll go with you," said the six, because they didn't know what else to say; doing the right thing for once because they did not know just then how to do a wrong one. I say Peter needed careful handling—I also say that he received it, for even the Master thinks it best before he says anything to him to go fishing too!

Standing on the shores as the day was dawning, Jesus saw his friends at their cheerless task. "Have you caught any-

thing?" said he. "No," said they, not knowing whom they were speaking to, not dreaming for an instant that the risen Lord would descend to interests so trivial. "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will," said he; and they did so, and took at one haul one hundred and fifty-three fish.

Then it was that John said, "It is the Lord," quick to recognize him—that is, quicker than the rest; it may be because of his better memory of a similar deed several months before, or his simple habit of thinking of the Master whenever success came, or a strangely intuitive power that he had of reading the very mind of his Lord.

Then it was that John said, "It is the Lord"; and then it was that Peter leaped forward to get to him. Even the Master, I say, must be careful in dealing with such a man, one who will run away from him one moment and leap toward him the next; and who cares so little for the boat, the net, and the fish he has just caught—the net that his pious associates do not forget to test to see that it is all right; the fish that they are eager to count, even in the presence of the Master—who cares so little for his

simple property and the material success of the moment as to throw it all to one side. Even the Master must give to him most careful attention; and he did.

✓ First of all, with the greatest of tenderness and tact, he brings to the mind of Peter his former profession of faith. "Simon," said he, "do you love me more than these"—more than Thomas and James and John and the other companions, busy, it may be, with the fish, or still lingering at the simple breakfast they had all taken together—"Do you love me more than these do? Do you?" That was all he said, but not all that Peter heard. "As you said you did," are the words that finish the sentence he hears, for it is only a little while since Peter made the boast that, no matter what the others might be and do, he would be true to the Lord to the very end. "All of you shall be offended because of me this night," said the Lord as they were going out through the darkness from the passover feast to the hill of Olives. "They will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered abroad." Then said Peter in calm assurance of strength, "Though all men

should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."

Well do I remember a young man who entered the ministry with me forty years ago. He is gone now; he went home after a year of service. Said the bishop—so the Circuit Rider used to tell the story—said the bishop as he rose to read the appointments, after prayer and a few moments of silent communion with the Lord on the part of each one of us, after a heart-searching to see one's motive and controlling purpose, such as we always inevitably have at that most dramatic and at times most tragic moment of real life—said the grand old bishop, whom we all delighted to follow, "The British Admiralty, when they were planning to take Quebec, were unable to find a leader. The oldest veteran whom they summoned, when asked if he could carry out their plans, said he thought he could, but was not sure. So said the next man whom they summoned; so the next. They met uncertainty and hesitation all along the line till they came to Wolfe. Said he, 'I'll do it or I'll die.' And," said the bishop, "he did both; he took Quebec, but he laid down his life as he

did it. So," added he, looking at each one of us, as if he would search out the very thought and intent of the soul, "so will it be with many of you. You are going to hard tasks. Brethren, are you ready?" And all of us said, "Ready; by the grace of God, ready. God grant it!" Then the bishop read the appointments, and then the young man whom I have held for these years in tenderest remembrance heard his assignment to a circuit famous for its poverty, its persecutions, and its poor returns. "It's all right," said he to me, as we separated, "it's all right. I am allowed of God to be put in trust with his gospel." So he went to his death. If I am faithful I will see him some time. O, I tell you, 'tis great work, this taking Quebec, this pushing up through the darkness and difficulties of a lonely, untrodden way, to the height where victory awaits you. 'Tis great work, and the man who has said that he would try it, the preacher who has once made holy confession of loyalty to the leader who called for the well-nigh impossible—that man can never be happy till he gets back again. Therefore the Master

will not let him forget where once he stood. The highest words spoken in the moments of enthusiasm, the Spirit of God will make him remember. His vows, his appeals, his professions of fidelity, his boasts of loyalty beyond that of his brethren—all these will be brought to his remembrance. "Do you love me, Simon, more than these?" But he did not overdo it; he asked for a confession of love three times, but only once for a confession similar to the one so vauntingly and voluntarily given a little while before. He will bring a man to the place where once he stood, but he will never keep him there. I say, our Lord showed great tenderness and tact in bringing to Peter's remembrance his former confession of faith.

"Were you ever a Methodist preacher?" said I to a man whom once I found sitting by the side of his sick wife in a poor, miserable attic in the dirtiest and most degraded hovel of a factory town. "Did you ever preach the gospel?" I repeated as the man stared at me, stammering some sort of an answer. "Why do you ask me?" he finally said. "I do not know," said I, "but were

you?" "Yes," said he, "for fourteen years I was a preacher." "Then," said I, "get back to your old work. To your knees for pardon, to the Word of God for power, and to hard work, the hardest possible, for the peace that passeth understanding. Remember what you said; remember what you have been; remember what the good Lord needs of men who have the experience in sin that you so dearly have purchased; remember the crowds about you who need to be led to the Saviour who can save to the uttermost, and get down to hard work, humbly asking the Lord to forgive you for your betrayal and your cowardice."

That was what the Master said, or words to the same effect. It's work that you need, people, work. "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs," get busy as an undershepherd of the flock I laid down my life for. The man who has left his Lord will not be permitted to forget that there is much still that he can do.

Years ago I preached a sermon on the text, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Evidently I magnified the

saving grace of sincere activity, for a saint of one of the chapters of Holy Mystics, identified with our church, quoted to me, with grim disapproval of what I had said, the words of Paul, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." It was not until I was thinking over the incidents of the day, after the evening service, that I saw what he meant. "God forgive him," said I, "and God pity him. To think that Paul, who could spend and be spent in the Master's service; who could see the path laid out before him and could go ahead unmoved, though it be to bonds and imprisonment; who could say, when awaiting the summons to his death, 'I have finished my course'—to think that Paul could magnify the faith that appropriates everything in sight and boldly asks for more, rather than the loyalty that gives and bears and does till it seems that nothing more can be given or done—to think that Paul is out of accord with James, is not to know him; and to keep on thinking that most detestable of monkish doctrines, is not to know human nature, is not to know the Master whose name we bear." No, there is nothing better

than work, and the man who has left his Lord needs to be told this immediately. Nothing better, and nothing more necessary.

"There is a whole day to-morrow that is not touched yet," I heard a lazy man once say, and I, though I am quite willing to keep everlastingly at it to the end—I say the same thing. There's a whole day ahead of you, a whole day, a whole week, a whole year, it may be; possibly, by the grace of God, more than a year. Think of what can be done, think of what must be done. There are churches to be built, Peter, there are letters to be written, there are saints to be comforted, there are sinners to be warned, there are children to be sheltered. Feed my sheep, Peter, feed my lambs; work, and get at it immediately. I say, our Lord showed his great wisdom in taking Peter out of the atmosphere of the class meeting to the cooler air of the street corner; away from professions of hectic loyalty to plans for immediate service.

Suppose, my friend, you are not sure of some of the teachings of your church; suppose you do see a bit of defect here and there in the creed of the fathers; suppose

that you recognize the other side of many a question as well as the one you accept as the true side—see it so plainly, that you cannot blame the man who thinks it to be the right one when you take into account his training and the traditions that he has heard from his youth up, suppose you are bothered as to many points of belief—is there any reason under God's heaven why you should not work out what you do believe? Does your theory of the atonement help or hinder you any in telling the story of the cross of Calvary? Does your view of Adamic guilt help you any, or hinder you, in your interpretation of the sin and sorrow and suffering of the poor fellows down in the village tavern, or the families they have left in destitution over on the hillside yonder? You have the facts of human nature, the conclusions of centuries of the study of man's power and possibility; you have the facts of the life of Jesus Christ, no matter how the book was written that tells you about them—no matter what you may say of inspiration or infallibility; you have a true record, if there is truth anywhere. You have the testimony given in

thousands upon thousands of cases of the power of Christ over poor, degraded souls. You have all of this and more, even if you have no sure conclusions as to Isaiah or Daniel, or the length of eternal punishment, or the heat of hell. You have got all of this, and if there is any good in you, you ought to get to work. "Feed my lambs, Peter, feed my sheep." Simple work must be done immediately. Go ahead and do it.

✓ All the more should he go ahead because of the success that is surely awaiting him. 'Tis not enough for the Master to bring to his remembrance his past profession and to show him the opportunity of glorious work all about him. He must go to the very limit to encourage him to move forward.

Three times Peter had denied his Lord, three times he must now confess him. When they separate from that conversation never to be forgotten, Peter must have the memory that every oath in denial has been met by a vow in confession, so that he can start out in his new ministry as a shepherd of the flock of his Lord with a record as

clean as contrition and repeated confession can make it. Peter must have this, and the Lord takes care that he gets it.

But in the giving of the confession there is more said to the Lord than the words imply, even as there was more said by the Lord when first he spoke to Peter than the simple question with which he greeted him. "I say nothing now of the future," said Peter, "I say nothing now of these others, I know little even of myself. Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that now I love thee with not only the glowing admiration and hearty respect that you ask for, but with a love that knows no question and no limit. Thou knowest that I love thee, I love thee!" That is what he said, a ringing note of tender attachment then and there—not one word of his anticipated attitude in the days of peace or storm that might follow. Then it was that the Master spoke: "Do you dare to say no word of the future because of a boast you can never forget? Do you hesitate to make any profession of faith beyond this moment of security? If you do, I'll tell you something, Peter. When you were

young you went around in full freedom where you cared to go; but when you get old another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." This spake he, signifying to Peter by what death he should glorify God—showing to the poor fellow who would not look one day ahead that at the last he would magnify his Master by a triumphant faith in death. "Don't be broken-hearted, Peter; I'll tell you that your hours of desertion and denial are over, that you are to be true to me to the end. Feed my lambs, go ahead about my work." I say the Master goes to the very limit to encourage him, and well he might. 'Tis the men who make the great sinners who might make the great saints; 'tis the men who have power for ill who might have power for good. Yes, and many of them are not bad at the start. Many of their sins have in them no more of will or purpose that is deliberate than had Peter's sin by the fire in the courtyard of the palace of the high priest on the night of betrayal. They are sins of hot-headedness, not hard-heartedness. These men need to be encouraged at the critical time, and the

Master will ever be alert to meet that need.

So, in the spirit of the Master, I would like to say to anyone who may hear me, who has the memory of glorious days with his Lord amid other scenes—I would like to say to him that he has the chance yet to do the work that angels covet and that could fill the Saviour's hands. I would like to urge him to claim the oft-repeated promise of the presence of the Master, to recall that his grip and his grace know no limit—that not even the fiends of hell can pluck a friend out of his hands—and urge him to go to his home and take down the old Bible and on his knees prepare a sermon on the text, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

VIII
THE COWARD
OR
THE SIN OF INACTIVITY

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"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine."—Matt. 25. 24, 25.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER

To tell the truth, I'm quite at a loss to know who Peter is aiming at. "Were there not ten cleansed?" said Peter when I asked him about these ministers he refers to in this sermon; "but where is the one?" If it were not for some things in his sermon, I would say that I thought it time for me to be getting back to college.

Two or three things are bothering me. I think you and I are near enough of an age for me to talk freely when I get back. Peter's word about one's not knowing his father till he is dead and gone, I take no stock in.

Most lovingly,

THOMAS.

P. S.—I had a good letter from the chap whom I saw out in the logging camp. There's music and dancing in that house, sure enough. One prodigal is safe home.

VIII

THE COWARD

I HAVE often thought of preaching a sermon on "The Holy Spirit's Second Choice"—not his first, but his second—taking for my text the message of God to the church in Laodicea, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Hot, the first choice; cold, the second: one thing or another; for or against; out in the open with God, or out in the open against him.

I have often thought of doing this, but as yet have found no time. I have a series on hand that will take all my skill and energy for at least fifty years more. I have often thought of paying my respects—under the inspiration, I trust, of the Spirit of God—to the lazy man who occasionally comes to hear me; pleading with him to get up and go where he belongs; to do and dare—it may be for the devil, his master, rather than do or dare nothing for anybody.

For, brethren, there's nothing that stirs

me more than laziness based upon commercial cowardice—the cold-blooded estimate of requirement and reward from a personal standpoint only; nothing that seems to me more foreign to the spirit of well-nigh reckless sacrifice that is in the very heart of the Christian character. For the lazy man ever makes his defense. He did so in the time of our Lord, and he does so now. He has the temerity to seek to justify himself—temerity is the word I use to-day; talk to me to-morrow about this out on the street, and I'll use another. He thinks, as did the shirker in that parable of the talents, that he should be commended for his wisdom. "I knew thee," said the servant in this old classic story—"I knew thee that thou art a hard man, and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine."

Afraid! May God forgive him! Afraid!—and coolly says so! May God pity him! Afraid, and thinking that cowardice can ever be accepted as an excuse! May the good Lord lead him into the light!

The sin of inactivity, let me say, in the

first place, is based upon a misconception of God's requirements. The servant does not know what his Lord wants. He thinks that he is asking to receive from him that which a little while before he gave to him—to be paid back his own coin. And he is, but much more also—the coin plus another one like it; the bit of gold and another bit of gold won by it from the markets of the wide world into which it had gone—or if not gold, silver; or if not silver, copper; or if not copper, at least the marks of usage. A battered coin, defaced and soiled, with the image and superscription worn smooth and well-nigh effaced by the touch of trade in many a bargain, is of greater value than the coin kept by cowardice unsoiled in a napkin.

God wants from man more than he gave to him. He gave him life—he wants it back again; he gave him heart power, brain force, the will to conceive and create: he asks for all these gifts and graces to be returned, and, with them, gifts and graces that they have gathered for themselves.

The man who tries to run away from the world that he may save his own soul knows

nothing of the requirements of his God. To save his soul, he must run into the world, not away from it. To get the purity that looks fair in the dazzling light of the glory of the judgment throne, he must risk eternal loss in the saving of some gem from the mire and filth of sin.

"Touch not the unclean thing. You cannot handle black pitch without being defiled," said an old minister not long ago to a younger one. "That may be," was the answer, "but this gem was in the pitch, and the main thing was not whether my hands were clean, but whether or not they were empty." "Right you are," said a rough old class leader who heard the conversation. "Next to having the marks of the atoning blood upon my hands, I'd like the scars and the stains that come through the attempt to save a sinner from his wretchedness."

"Tis the shine upon the silver, the purity that suggests the shelter out of sight, the nest in the napkin, that stirs the indignation of the Master. He wants his own with what his own should win. He wants you with the men you might rescue from

misery. He wants me with some of you fellows who down deep in your heart think that the preacher is after you.

Nine men are preaching the gospel to-night whom the Lord sent me to find. Nine men! Some of these are mighty good preachers—not one of them a poor one. Some of them preach in churches that give the same twist to its sacred shibboleth that I give; others, in churches that drop the mystic letter. Some of them I hear from every now and then; others have probably forgotten me. But, nine men are preaching the gospel who first said “Yes” to the call of the Spirit in answer to some question I had the good privilege to give them, and though I’m lost at the last, those men are saved. If the original coin never gets back to the treasury of its Lord, nine better ones will be spared him.

The sin of inactivity, let me say, in the second place, is based upon a misconception of God’s character. “I know thee,” said the servant, “that thou art a hard man—a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed.” But was he? He gave

to the servant a good start in life—a good share of his own property. He gave to him absolute freedom and unlimited opportunity. It was to a “far country” that he went, and it was not until “after a long time” that he returned. He took into consideration his native capacity. To each one he gave “according to his several ability”—to the brilliant man, five talents; to the man of average ability, two; and to the poor fellow who had never done much, and of whom little should be required, one. He was ready with a hearty welcome. The man who brought back two talents heard the same cheery commendation that the man who had won five talents heard. The man of one talent might have heard the same. And yet, the servant calls the “Master” a “hard man”!

So I say, God is not known. His thoughts, his love, his tender interest in the small details of even a petty life, are no more known to many of us than the divine deliberation before the fall. Even the saints know not God. Men who have centuries of the activity of Jesus Christ to learn from, men who have their own Christian

experience, read their New Testament, study every day, and dare to stand in Christ's stead and beseech men to be reconciled to God—even the saints do not know him yet. Men who think that they are commissioned to analyze the brilliancy of God's sunlight see through a glass, darkly.

"Your God is my devil," said a great preacher a hundred years ago to a man who wore holy livery. A hundred years from now, when people read what some of us—called to be sane as well as saints—seriously profess to hold as unshaken truth, men will say of us the same.

God is not known. Some of us have hardly seen him, even by faith. Some of us have no capacity to judge, if we do see. The dog may never know his master, though he may know his master's step and could trace his wanderings through a pathless forest. The child may never know his father till he is no longer a child and till long after his father has gone. When you've learned your lesson there is no one to hear it. When you are ready to graduate from childhood into comradeship your father is either calling out farewell or

falling back to a childhood that manly maturity fears as it does not fear its plague.

Some of us have no capacity by nature or by grace to interpret the character of the One who daily speaks to us. Some of us with the capacity have not the inclination. The man who hardly knows his own child; who never takes a walk with him, never plays with him; who hurries him off to school in the morning and sends him off to bed at night that he may be undisturbed in his own mighty moments of thinking—that man will have no true inclination to know his Father who is in heaven. He may say that he has, but saying so doesn't make it so. The testimony of a careless husband or indifferent father as to the nature of God is not worth the breath the man uses in giving it; even the report of such a man of the clear testimony of some true witness is sure to be false somewhere.

Down in the big city where some of the preachers who fish with me during their summer vacations have their parishes, there is a man holding a good position who has never made in the commercial world anything other than a mistake. He's engaged

to give advice, so I'm told, at difficult times. Whenever the members of the firm are uncertain what to do they call on him, and then when he has given his advice they go directly against it. If he were to say that it would be a fair afternoon, every man would send for his overcoat and umbrella. If he were to suggest that they add to the insurance on their property, they would reduce it by thousands. If he were to beg and beseech them to sell, they would telegraph to their brokers to buy. So there are some men whom I like to hear talk of God. When they are through I know how to reach a conclusion.

Not long ago I was called to a home where a little child had just died—the only child of humble people, a young couple that had moved into the town a year or so before. The poor mother was crushed by her burden; the father had gone to the village to make the saddest of all arrangements. I speedily found that I was not the first one who had come to that home, although I had hurried on my errand as soon as word had been brought to me. The doctor had been there and had volunteered to express

his opinion concerning what he called the cause of the bereavement. He had dared to tell the mother that God had seen fit to afflict her that he might bring her to himself. "What do you mean, sir?" said the poor woman. "Frankly this," was the answer: "nothing of this nature ever comes into one's life except as a punishment for sin—either some open sin or some secret sin. Either you or your husband or both of you have been living away from God, and therefore it has pleased the Lord to afflict you." "'Tis a lie," said I; "in the name of the One whose ministry I covet, 'tis a lie. God has other things to do than to crush the souls of tender mothers. Indeed, before he came in the person of his Son, it was said of him, 'He is coming to bind up the broken-hearted.' " "But," said the mother, falteringly, "he told me that I had made an idol of my little boy, and so the Lord had been compelled to take him away." "That is another mistake of the same character," said I, though eager to use a shorter word; "that's like the other one. God wants you to love your children with all your heart. It was said of John the Baptist, centuries

ago—that man who was to be great in the sight of the Lord—that one of the things he had to do in life was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. It was not necessary to turn the hearts of the mothers—thank God, it wasn't, and it never will be. And the man who says that a man or woman can love a little innocent child whom God has given them more than they ought to love him breaks one of the thundering commands of Sinai. When he offers his interpretation of some 'inscrutable providence,' as he styles it, he takes God's name in vain, and is in the same list with the loafer on the corner, so far as profanity is concerned, who condemns everything in sight. No," said I, "God is sorry, too. He feels with you. He comes to comfort, not chide; to bid you trust him, not be afraid of him; to tell you that he is keeping your little one for you—keeping him safe where no sickness can touch him, or sin taint him, or sorrow break his little heart. He is keeping him for you ready to give him back when you get home."

That night I went off to the schoolhouse, where I was to preach, and had great free-

dom in speaking of Job. "It seems to me you were a little hard on Bildad," said one of the old men as we were leaving the service. "Possibly, I was," said I, "but I had reasons."

3- The sin of inactivity is based upon a misconception of what is worth while in human nature. The poor wretch doesn't know that the last thing a man should seek to save is personal security. Said the Master, "He that loseth his life shall find it." Said the devil in his sneering comment on the piety of the old saint of the land of Uz, "All that a man has will he give for his life." But the Lord is truth incarnate, and the devil is and always will be the "father of lies." The last thing a man should seek to save is personal security, and the one thing he ought to fear is fear. When you are afraid to go one step, go two. When you are inclined to hold back because you think you may endanger your own precious self—for this reason and no other—hit the devil a blow between the eyes and leap forward. For when a man saves himself at the cost of his self-respect, what has he that is worth the keeping? When he knows where

the talent lies hid, spurned by the worms even as of no merit, what satisfaction can it give him if he remembers that a shirking coward buried it?

Caution, even, is not the exalted virtue the ordinary saint thinks it is; shrewdness may be rank selfishness, and selfishness is the blackest sin. In the list of virtues, as well as in the roster of the saints, the first may be last and the last first. Afraid! Afraid of what? Afraid of whom? Of his fellow servant? Possibly. Of the tricks of trade? Possibly. Of some thief who might break in upon him and find him unprepared to meet him? Possibly. But afraid!—a coward and a shirk.

Over yonder, in a village not far away, is a man who will never listen to good preaching. He's afraid of the clear call of opportunity. He dreads to hear the last ringing words of appeal that come from a soul aglow with communion with God. His pastor—poor fellow!—thinks he stays away because the preaching is poor. Not so—he stays away because it's good. His fears control. He came to hear me when last I was there.

Over in a town near the State line, where I spent a few years in fruitful work, there is a young man—not so young now—who left his home and lives at the village tavern. He is not dissipated—he's too much of a coward to risk the curse of drink; nor is he discontented with what the old folks on the old farm have to give him. For neither of these reasons has he left his home. He is afraid of the searching, tender look of his saintly mother. He's afraid he'll have to quit his meanness if he stays around home. Fear is at the root of much of the inactivity that sits in dignified and most condescending attention in the pew reserved for strangers on the great occasions when the church is filled. Fear, cowardly fear! "I was afraid," said this coward whom our Lord knew. "I am afraid," say the men I meet who shirk responsibility; who move proudly on the momentum given them by their godly ancestry and boast of their progress; who think a high seat in heaven ought to be kept for them because they pay their honest debts and profess on all occasions that they make no professions. "I am

afraid," is what they say, or what they would say if they were as frank as this sinner of the parable.

'Tis for this reason—this detestation of fear as a motive—that many of us hate to scare a man from hell. "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," says Paul; "but the love of Christ constraineth us." We hate to scare a man from hell; we are not fools enough to think that we can frighten him into heaven. No; fear is one of the last motives that a man should care to admit a speaking acquaintance with. 'Tis enough to confess that years ago one dark night on a desolate road you were introduced to him. 'Tis enough to make you blush for shame to say that you would recognize him even now if he were to accost you. 'Tis a disgrace to be on intimate terms with fear. This master was absent in the far country for a long time, and all the while this servant had a coward's comradeship, to his shame be it said.

'Tis the man who dares in the business world who succeeds; 'tis the man who dares in the spiritual world who succeeds,

also. Mary won a name for a deed that is to be told as a memorial of her for all time—because she dared to be extravagant for her Lord and Master. It was a glorious recklessness that sanctified the breaking of the alabaster box. Paul won a name by daring to pray for a curse on himself, if thereby he could save his brethren. Moses justified the wisdom of his selection for all time when he dared to ask to have his name blotted out of the book of the pious if the name of his people were also blotted out. He who dares wins every time. If you dare to say to a sinner, “God will forgive you”—if you say it because you honestly believe it—because you trust the man who turns to you in the agony of his penitence and trust the God to whom you turn—if you dare to say to him, “God will forgive you,” God will. “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth,” said the Master, “shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” God honors the man who dares to trust him to the limit; and God will cast the man who is afraid into outer darkness, where he

can of necessity associate with fears to the end of time.

Hurry to your homes, brethren; dig up the hidden treasure; unwrap these napkins; get the talent into quick circulation—and dare for God—and the blessing of success will attend you.

IX
BARTIMÆUS
OR
THE PLACE OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

“And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”—Mark 10. 52.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

In a neighboring parish there has just been held a church trial. The man against whom charges were brought had done certain things prohibited by the church, but not such, so Peter tells me, as would "shut him out of the kingdom of grace and glory." I think he was not expelled. I am not sure.

This has led to much talk among us of the place of discipline and authority in the church. I am glad to send this sermon to you, for I know that you are in hearty accord with what is said in it.

Most lovingly,

THOMAS.

P. S.—You need not thank me for doing this work for you. I like it immensely. Tell me a year from now to "go my way," and I'll follow Peter—and, it may be, the One Peter follows, too!

IX

BARTIMÆUS

BARTIMÆUS, whose story you have just heard, was granted by the Master absolute freedom. He was told to go where he wanted to go—to his home; to the house of some rejoicing friend; to the familiar spot by the highway where he had stood for years in his blindness and beggary; or forward. He was not requested to show himself to the priest; nor to go back to his friends to tell them what great things the Lord had done for him; nor to some one deep in affliction whose burden he was peculiarly qualified to share. He was permitted to go immediately where his inclination might lead him—up the breezy road along the hillside or down through the sheltered valley; to the village he had just left or to the Holy City of visions and dreams; to devotion; to work; or to play. Therefore he followed Christ.

Without one word of comment, without the offer of reward, without a note of

pathetic appeal, without the sign of the cross or the suggestion of the crown, our Lord added Bartimæus to the company of those who followed him.

I suppose, friends, that Bartimæus could hardly help it—that the force of example was too strong for him to withstand. Everyone was following Christ that glorious day; old and young, Pharisees and publicans, saints and sinners—all were going forward with him. For it was the third year of his ministry. He was well known. He had healed, maybe, hundreds of lame and blind, lepers and deaf. Five thousand at one time had been miraculously fed by him, four thousand at another. Even the winds and the waves, it was said, obeyed him; and the report had spread from fireside to fireside that if he were near, death even need bring no terror to the home. Of course the multitudes followed him. His reputation was at its highest. The people of Palestine were of simple tastes and humble toil, therefore free to leave their tasks at will; and Jesus was manifestly a leader, ready to dare a new thought or a strong deed,

or to break, if need be, with the traditions of the centuries. Of course the multitudes went with him; therefore Bartimæus did the same.

I admit that thus far there is not much of moral worth nor of beauty in the decision. There is no stirring of the emotion; and most of us believe that the flush of the cheek, or the moisture of the eye, or tremor under tension when one makes a decision for time and eternity, for God as against the devil—that these are inevitable if there be sincerity, and most of us like to see a man show that he feels what he, by word or deed, says. There is little, if any, emotion here; yet, Bartimæus is deliberately going the right way, and emotion will come sooner or later.

I admit that there is no certainty that he is doing a highly commendable thing. It may be that he is borne along by the crowd against his will—permitted, indeed, to go where he cared to go, but too weak to assert that privilege in the presence of all the people. It may be that he yielded to the majority simply because it was the

majority, or to the contagion of approval borne down upon him by the thundering bursts of applause that everywhere greet the Master, without admitting the righteousness of it all. It may be that there is no probability that he will follow the Lord very far. I know all this, but I also know that he is deliberately moving toward Jerusalem, not Jericho; forward, not backward; with the Master, and not away from him. I admit all this even though I recognize that the reasons controlling may not be the highest.

A deed done because of the force of example may not be the best, but it is frequently a mighty acceptable one, none the less, and has brought many a man to his knees in gratitude to God. "No, I'm not a member of this church—neither of this nor of any other," said a man to me one day at the close of a service I was leading in a strange town. "I come to church because of my early training, because of the good example of a sainted mother and saintly wife. I make no profession of love for the Lord, though I wish I could. I think I would stand for him

and by him if he were to ask me, no matter what might be the risk to my own precious self, but I have none of this feeling that you folks evidently have. Put me down as one who likes to go with a good crowd—that's all," said he, with a laugh. But, friends, he came to the church, not the saloon or the club; he moved toward Jerusalem, not Jericho; forward, not backward—and I told him that I thanked God that it was so, though I would pray that on the way he might be granted some incentive of higher worth.

I say, it may be that Bartimæus went away with Christ simply because of the force of example, or, it may be, brethren, that he wanted to see more of the Master. It may be that holy curiosity controlled—a curiosity that gave way to serious interest—an interest ready to surrender the moment loyalty made its claim—a loyalty awaiting the coming of a love that might never waver nor weaken. For he is new to the blessing of sight. 'Tis only a moment or two since he sat in the desolation of midnight darkness. 'Tis only a moment since he first looked on the face of anyone. He

needed time to grasp his privilege, to see what he had, to gather together the elements that entered into the gift of vision, to readjust them and assign to them his first estimate of their worth. He needed time to see the heavenly vision—yes, heavenly vision—for 'tis the face of Christ that he sees.

“Do not waste your sympathy on me,” said a dear old saint whom once I knew who was totally blind. “The first face I am to see will be that of my Lord. I have something ahead of me in heaven that the rest of you can never get. Not only to see, but to see with the avidity and freshness—with the consuming interest of one who sees for the first time. Waste no sympathy on me. Save it for the blind man who is climbing up the hill of youth with the long levels of maturity on the plains above him. Do not give it to me, far down the western slope, who hears the singing of the little brooks that sweep into the river of Death not far ahead. Do not dare to give it to me, for the saints on the opposite shore might hear and misunderstand. I'm soon to see my Saviour first of all.”

I know that nothing of this is written in the story of Mark. I know very well that neither curiosity nor interest, neither loyalty nor love, is named in this brief record; but I also know that 'tis not denied that they were there: and if not denied, the chances are they were in force. For they would control to-day. The face that Bartimæus looked upon was the most beautiful—or most noble—for beautiful is hardly the word I want to use when speaking of the majestic sweetness that sat enthroned upon the Saviour's brow—the most beautiful and most noble that man could ever see. True, there is no record of his appearance in Scripture, and secular history as well as tradition is strangely silent also. Nevertheless, we are not left merely to a Yankee guess or a poet's dream. On his face there was no suggestion of weakness, no line of care, no scar of sin. His eyes were as pure as the eyes of a mother as she lifts her face in prayer to God by the side of her sleeping child. His face was full of the glow of health, half concealed, half disclosed by the touch of the sunshine and the storm met by him through thirty

vigorous years of peasant life in Galilee. There is no wavering of purpose, no evasion of responsibility, no record of a struggle with the dastardly temptation of cowardice, no pitiable plea for help, no dull-eyed self-sufficiency, no fear of defeat nor memory of failure.

The face that Bartimæus saw was one to summon the interest of the most jaded and most indifferent. Surely it caught and held the attention of this man who, a moment ago, could see no one, and who knew that the one on whom he looked was the one who enchained the attention of all others as well. Surely, then, it was eager interest that had to do with the choice of his path as well as the force of a good example.

Why, man never sees enough of Christ, no matter how far he goes with him. "Where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing friend?" said an old saint centuries ago when he came to die. He had bidden farewell to loved ones and neighbors, and then had turned to his Lord as if he never had seen him before. No sinner ever leaps for a look at the Crucified One as does the friend who has seen him in his

hour of activity and tender sympathy for a lifetime. We cannot see the face of Christ as often as we want to see it.

Well do I remember an old sufferer in a quiet home away from the intrusion of strangers or the welcome call of friends. Lonely? Lonely!—that old woman's desolation was not even tenanted by memories, and, till Christ came her way, never visited by visions. She was totally blind and absolutely deaf. She could not see the lightning flash nor hear the peal of thunder that echoed and reëchoed through the mountains that towered above her humble home. She would put a woolen glove upon her hand, then stretch it pathetically toward you. On it you would see the letters of the alphabet and conclude that you would have to spell out your laborious message. I remember how long it took me to spell out the simple prayer, "May God bless you." I remember that I never afterward had to spell more than two words of that sentence. She would look up with a glory in her face that no artist has ever caught, few have seen, and none have put on canvas. "Bless you?" she would say in the

strangely monotonous tone pitched in a high key never heard by herself and never to be heard. "Bless you? May God bless you? Were you going to say that? May God bless you as well." I remember that I used to feel as if heaven had sent a special dispensation of grace when that old saint called down God's blessing upon me. One day I went to her and asked her for a message for the church. We were to have a roll call. Each one was to answer to his name with a word of testimony as to his faith in Christ or sense of security through him. If not present each one was to answer through some friend or through some word that he or she had written. "Mrs. Whitlock," said I, "what is your message to the people?" I remember the difficulty I had in making her understand my purpose. "What is the testimony you would like to give when your name is called?" Quicker than a flash came the even-toned answer: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." What would the saint of Uz have given to have heard that? I know I wrote it down, and all the rest of her message of trust and assurance through

Christ. I know that when I read it to the people there was hardly a dry eye in the house. She was trusting in God as revealed to her through Jesus Christ—and he will never disappoint. O, I hope she has gone by this time! I have been eager for years to send my congratulations to her son the moment she dies. Why not? Why want her to linger here where all is darkness and solitude, when just across the stream are youth and sight and companionship with the saints—and her Saviour first of all? That old town will be the poorer when she goes, and the wise and the mighty who occasionally attend the little church during the long summer season could be spared, all of them, more easily than she; for her prayers were behind many a prayer meeting and many a lifeless sermon—lifeless till the moment God sent her faith to inspire it. She thought I came to bring a blessing, but she little knew my selfishness. I came to get one, and I always carried away more than I dared to anticipate. Even she never could see in vision enough of Christ, saint though she was and shut away in solitude to visions of her Lord, and him alone.

Surely, eager interest may have led Bar-timæus to make Christ's way his way, together with the compelling sense of gratitude.

Even if the people had not been going his way, and interest had not controlled, I take it, the sense of gratitude would have prompted him. No longer is he a beggar; no longer a blind man; no longer a charge upon the charity of the passers-by. He is a man with sight and strength and the spirit to do what duty and opportunity suggest to him, and Christ is the cause of it all. Most surely, the quick glance that he had of the Master's face could not suffice. He must see him again. He must tell him once more, and then once again, and then repeat whenever opportunity came, his sense of an obligation that would never be met so long as God permitted him to live, and his undying gratitude.

I know that some of you do not like our testimony meetings. I have heard people sneer at the lack of originality (as if that were peculiar to the conversation of the saints), at the lack of new thought or present-day illustrations, in the words one

hears on Wednesday nights in the prayer service, or in the cottage meetings we hold from time to time. I know that at times I have wondered if there were any sin in new ideas that our leaders in praise to God should so shun them; that I have questioned the wisdom of getting men to their feet to utter in phrase and tone a sentence hot a score of years before but now apparently dying or dead. I know that I have often said that our prayer meetings should be defended against their friends—that they had nothing to fear from their enemies, but much from the men who claimed to love them. All this I know; yet, I'll urge you to sing the old songs, and repeat once more the old promises, and tell again the story of your experience with Jesus Christ, when next we come together. I know that many a man speaks the name of Christ and tells the old story from the sense of gratitude. For 'tis not to the people who sit around that the man who rises to offer his word of testimony is speaking—not to the few saints scattered about the dimly lighted vestry watching the clock, reading the advertisements on the fly leaves of the song books,

planning how to make a dollar or two more on the morrow—but to the Master himself that he offers what he has to say. This is the reason why some of the men I know have just as good a time preaching to an audience of a few as to an audience of many. A large part of the sermon is talk with God, not about him; talk in answer to what he has said, not to the facts or figures clamoring for recognition on the pages of the last book the preacher has read.

I know of a man who went off one Sunday to a little schoolhouse to preach the sermon God had given him during the week—only to find that not one soul had come to hear him—not one. Of course he felt disappointed—for if any man has cause to think of his littleness, and regret it in season and out of season, 'tis the servant of God. He sees large ideals and large men continually, and he keeps in sight—if God give him grace—One who is perfection in thought and deed. Of course he felt disappointed, but he went ahead, nevertheless, and he had a good time preaching. Fact—a good time, for he was talking to God and thanking him for what he had

done for his soul. A man happening to pass the church just when the preacher was having highest liberty stepped up to the window and looked in to see if there were any vacant seats. When he saw no one but the preacher present, he turned and made for town as fast as a man trained in the atmosphere of gossip, conscious that he had a new story, could go. The next Sunday that building was packed to the doors; yet, even then the preacher talked to God, thanking him for what he had done for his soul. I say, gratitude is a factor that must not be ignored: 'tis for this that Bartimæus made Christ's way his way.

So, friends, I have given over reading the Discipline to my people. I do not think it best. I have an idea that you do not need to be told what to do, or where to go, or how much to give, or when to go to bed, or how to treat the man who works for you. I have an idea that you do not need it, and I have an idea that the Master does not like it to be done. We take away from many a deed its beauty and charm—I would go so far as to say its worth—when we make it compulsory and not voluntary.

The faded flower your little child gives you of her own free will is worth infinitely more to you than the present her mother compels her to buy. One step toward Jerusalem taken by Bartimæus because he wanted to go that way is worth more than the entire distance to the Holy City if taken under authority of church or state. And mind you, as I have said, all this compulsion is not needed. Thank God, 'tis not needed. The Master trusted Bartimæus. The church may trust its converts also.

Man, "go your way"—and after a bit I'll cross the road and walk with you. I'm going with Christ. I have no fear for you. If we leave you alone, you'll go too.

X
CLEOPAS
OR
THE TARDY RECOGNITION OF JESUS CHRIST

187

“And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.”—Luke 24. 30, 31.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

I do not know whether Peter had the old man in mind of whom I wrote to you a few days ago, when he preached this sermon. One or two references in this sermon lead me to believe that he is after me!

After the sermon was over I went to see this old man—he is nearly eighty years of age. He has had no Christian faith; he has lived a clean life. He asked me about the sermon, and I gave it to him. What do you think happened? When it was over he asked me to pray with him, and I did; and as Peter said, with more emotion than I have ever seen, when I told him about it, “he came through to pardon and peace.”

Lovingly,

THOMAS.

P. S.—’Tis great work you are in.

X

CLEOPAS

THESE two men, Cleopas and Luke—I guess it was he—walked one day the greater part of eight miles with Jesus Christ, yet failed to recognize him! They talked with him about the crucifixion of their Lord only three days before—for it was on the first Easter Day when this walk was taken to Emmaus. They asked him the meaning of many of the obscure passages in Old Testament prophecy, and heard such answers as no man ever had heard or ever will hear. They listened to the greatest sermon ever preached, for its topic was the Resurrection; the Preacher, the risen Saviour; the time, the hour of our Lord's matchless triumph. They felt their hearts burn within them as they caught glimpses of most glorious truth, yet did not know that they were walking with Jesus Christ.

Not until the end of the journey was reached, till they were seated at the supper table, till they had asked their guest to

SIMON PETER, SHEPHERD

pray God's blessing on the bread
 them, did they know that the Stranger
 their Lord and Master. Not till till
 his face "shine as the sun," or not till
 print of the nails in his hands as he
 them in prayer; not till he was just
 to leave them, did they know who he
 Surely this was a most tardy recognition
 a Friend.

They had met him, however, after
 hope had gone. We must remember
 Not a ray of hope, not the vision
 dream that might justify an involuntary
 prayer, was left to them. "We trusted
 said they, "that it had been he who should
 have redeemed Israel. We trusted. Certain
 women of our company who were with
 early at the sepulcher found not his body
 but saw a vision of angels who said he was
 alive; and certain of them who were with
 us went to the sepulcher and found it even
 so as the women had said—but him they
 saw not."

In the only place under God's heaven
 where man has no right to seek for Christ,
 they looked and failed to see him, and,
 failing, lost all hope. Had they made their

bed in hell, had they ascended up into heaven, had they taken the wings of the morning and found a dwelling place in the uttermost parts of the sea, they might have looked for Christ and not been disappointed—but not in the grave of Joseph of Arimathæa. Our Lord was there once, but only once. He never entered a second time, and never will.

Hope, then, was gone, and with it the power readily to see. Said a poor old man to me once, "My daughter left home ten years ago to go to a life of—— to go to the far country. For years I sought for her. I sent her picture to the midnight missions in our big cities with the request that it be hung near the door. I wrote upon the picture the simple words, Come home. I wrote letters; I put an advertisement in the War Cry, and for weeks in the personal columns of one of the great dailies of New York." "Are you doing anything now?" said I, as the old man stopped. "O, no!" said he; "I am sure from what has been told me that she died six years ago in Chicago. Still," added he, "I was told the other day by a woman who knew my

daughter well that she was seen only a week ago on Sixth Avenue." "Did you follow it up?" I asked, as the old man tried to talk of something else. "Did you try to find out who it was?" "Of course not," was the answer; "she's dead—dead now for six years." The fact is, the old man's hopes were dead—dead beyond the possibility of a resurrection. No longer did he walk the midnight streets of a sinning city, alert to every suggestion; no longer did his imagination tantalize him with visions of the girl he might see as he turned the next corner; no longer did he hear the cry of a child just as he was falling to sleep—the cry that sent him out on the street in the search that was never rewarded. "She's dead, sir—been dead for six years. Of course I didn't follow it up. No use."

When hope dies, man's readiness to see dies too. Cleopas may walk the Emmaus road with a Stranger who can speak as only One could speak, with a glowing heart that no doubt could chill, yet not recognize his Lord—for the hope of ever seeing him has at last been buried under the sod.

Then, too, these men met him in an

unfamiliar place. They were going to a village that our Lord had never entered—over a road that he had never taken. This is not Galilee, but Judea. Had Emmaus been in Galilee, the chances are that it could have told some stories of the blessed Lord's activity in its homes, or its streets. Hardly a town in Galilee but knew the sound of his voice and the sight of his face.

“What would I have given could I have been with you!” said I to a privileged preacher the other day—a man permitted by the grace of God to cross the seas and spend a month or more in the Holy Land. “What a blessing! Man, you ought to preach now if there's any power in you. Think of it! You were three days in Nazareth, two days on the Sea of Galilee, a night up in the hills alone praying as you never prayed before! You ought to preach as if the good Lord were speaking through you.” For Galilee is sacred soil even to the humblest and the most matter-of-fact of us. It was heaven and home to Jesus.

Nor was this Jerusalem, the city of Pilate, and Herod, and Judas the Traitor; the city of the cross and the tomb; the city

over which He wept; where he heard little children shout for joy his name; where the very stones of the street were eager to lift their high hosannas.

Nor was this Bethany, nor the road to Bethany, but an unfamiliar road to an unknown town. The hill over yonder that they now are passing is not associated in their memory with any hungry multitude or listening throng of eager disciples; the brook they cross with the sheltering shade of the trees inviting them to pause a bit away from the heat of the day never gave to Christ a cooling drink or bathed his weary feet; the hut of the peasant who comes out to look at the three strangers passing by—who looks for a moment and then hurries back to call the wife to come and look too—that hut, Jesus of Nazareth had never seen. An unfamiliar road to an unknown town; therefore, they are not ready to recognize him. With all hope gone and with no memory to assert itself, with no future and no past identified with Christ, it is not strange that the present offered to them no suggestion of his nearness.

I can recognize almost anyone whom I ever knew if I can see him in familiar surroundings. I can call up names that I have not spoken for twenty years if I put myself where these names were used by me in cordial greetings in days gone by. But the names of men whom I meet in this village, whom I have as acquaintances, if not friends, are frequently lost to me when I'm away from home. When I'm not thinking of seeing you men; when I'm where I have no right to believe these townspeople of mine ever go, I fail to recognize as readily as I would. "Tell me where I saw you last, will you?" said I to a man who came up to me on the street of the big city that once I visited. "Tell me where I saw you, where I used to know you, and I'll tell you your name." And I did. The unfamiliar setting deceived me for a time.

I knew of a man years ago, a humble brother, who left one night a little meeting in a schoolhouse under deep conviction of sin. On his way home he was overtaken by a terrific thunderstorm. He was forced to seek for shelter under a bridge that

crossed the road a half mile or so from his home. He had to stay there an hour or more, but as he stayed he prayed. "The sorrows of death compassed me about," said he in a testimony I can never forget, for it was David's over again. "In my distress I called upon the Lord. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice. Then he sent from above and took me, drew me out of many waters, and delivered me from my strong enemy. He brought me forth also into a large place. He delivered me, for he delighted in me." Ever afterward when that man found a poor sinner who could not get through to pardon and peace he would say to him, "Come with me; I know a place where you can find Him." And he'd take the man under the bridge there to pray with him, and there

time and time again to see the sinner leap to meet his Saviour.

You must remember also, friends, that Cleopas and Luke met our Lord at a time when they couldn't see clearly. Not only hope and memory were denied them, but light as well. "Their eyes were holden that they should not know him." Don't ask me why, for I do not know. Nor does anyone know. "I am better off now than I have been for years!" said a man whose life I was reading last Sunday evening in a letter to a friend. "God be thanked, and God grant, too, that I may not require to be taken down by some terrible trouble. I often fancy I shall be. If I am, I shall deserve it as much as any man who ever lived. I say so now, justifying God beforehand, lest I should not have faith and patience enough to justify him when the punishment comes."

The ways of God are past finding out. Why the Master should see fit to dim the vision of men whose souls were darkened by doubts and whose hearts were heavy and sad, is more than I can tell. I sometimes wonder if Luke gave the right explana-

tion—if he did not reflect a little too decidedly the influence of Paul upon him. 'Tis Luke, you know, who speaks of Lydia as the woman “whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul,” as if one did not have the key to his own heart where he alone could find it—a key that he alone could use. No, I do not know anything about it. The ways of God are past finding out. Sometime, somewhere, we'll understand.

Neither do I know why our Lord asked them to account for their sadness or pretend that he didn't know what had taken place those last few days in Jerusalem, or make, when he came to Emmaus, “as though he would go further.” All that I know is, for some gracious reason these men could not see clearly.

“Isn't that the explanation of many a page of Christian history?” said a bright young fellow I've been talking to these last few days as a father might talk to a son—“Isn't that the key to much of the conduct that seems to us so strange?” “Yes, my boy, and isn't it the key to your own?” said I in reply.

It is light that we need—God's good daylight. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men," said John, in tribute to your Lord and mine. "He was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." 'Tis the power to see clearly that we need.

Much of the sin of this world is due to ignorance, or that which passes as sin; and much of the piety due to a clear vision of the consequences of one's action. Some people are so bad at heart that they are most exemplary in conduct. They know so well the path they are on, and equally well the paths that lead away from it, that they keep to it mighty carefully. 'Tis the silly simpleton—the youth who knows no wrong—who strays away into the horrors of a reckless life. 'Tis light we need—light for the sinner and light for the saint. 'Tis not safe to go along the ways of the world after sundown. On many a fact you need the glare of high noon. When the shadows lengthen seek a shelter and rest for the night.

"It is toward evening," said Cleopas, "and the day is far spent." Never was

truer word spoken. It was "toward evening," and they couldn't see. They needed more light. But as he broke the bread, at the table in a home sacred for evermore to all who love the Easter story, "their eyes were opened, and they knew him."

Along this road many of us are going; the way that leads to Emmaus is a beaten path. Doubts and discouragements, perplexity and pain, hopelessness and dimness of vision belong to many a man I know. Would to God I could make him see the Stranger by his side—that I could make him realize who that Stranger is!

For Christ walks these streets of ours as once he walked the blessed paths of Galilee. Christ is alive for evermore. The grave could not keep him and can never ask for him. Death has no hold, and never will have, on the Lord of life and glory.

An old minister I know of was one day writing an Easter sermon. When half through his work the thought of what he was saying appeared to him with a vividness it had never assumed. The old man could not sit still. He leaped to his feet repeating, "Christ is alive! Christ is living, liv-

ing, living! My people shall know it. I shall speak of it again and again until they believe it as I do now." And he did.

"How do you know," said a boy to a humble teacher in a Sunday school in a little church where once I was pastor—"How do you know that he rose again? That was nineteen hundred years ago. How do you know?" Said the teacher in the story of her experience with her class, "I was for a moment at a loss how to answer. All that I could say was this, 'I know because I have felt his living presence, because he has revealed himself to me.'"

"Thank God," said I, "you could say nothing better. Thank God for the blessing of a personal Christian experience! 'Tis that alone that will sustain you in the moment of bereavement or subtle temptation. 'Tis that alone that gives the foundation to the church on which it can safely build."

The Holy Spirit did not limit his work to conversation with the few saints who were privileged to write, in words to be treasured for all time, their story of Christ's words and deeds and position among men;

no, the Holy Spirit talks to you and me to-day and bears continued testimony to one fact—the active presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Never lose hope. Some time you'll meet him. Some time you'll have the grace of the burning heart. Some time the Emmaus road will take its last turn and lead you straight to the little village where the guest you welcome in courtesy to your home will prove to be the Saviour you have longed to see. Never think that you are on a Christless road. No man ever went where the Master had not preceded him. "Where I am, there shall my servant be also," said he on the night of the betrayal. Never fail to pray for the gift of vision. Most of us see as through a glass, darkly. To only a few rare spirits is it given to realize the beauties and the grandeur all about us; to only a few, to see with eyes unholden. Never fail to trust the risen Saviour. In his own good time, in his own good way, he will reveal himself.

XI
THE HAPPY ANGELS
OR
THE REVIVAL THAT STIRS HEAVEN

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."—Luke 15. 4-7.

**EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM THOMAS, JR., TO
HIS FATHER**

The man whom Peter referred to in one of the first sermons I sent you—the preacher who had not seen a member added to his church during a twelvemonth—has been visiting us for a few days. He is much distressed over his work. Peter could not prevail on him to preach, though he tried hard.

I asked Peter if it was not because of this man that he preached this sermon. "Partly for him," said he, "and partly for another." I guess I know now to whom he refers.

Lovingly,
THOMAS.

XI

THE HAPPY ANGELS

IN this old Book, opened daily by most of us with unfeigned reverence, there are stories of all sorts of evangelistic work, especially in that part of the Book that deals with the life of our Lord and the men who followed in his steps. We may read of work that failed, of work with small returns, of work that brought thousands into the church in a day, of work that influenced life in the palace of a king, and of work that stirred heaven; of the revival in Athens, in Philippi, and in Jerusalem; in Cæsar's household, and in the humble home of the saint known only to his Saviour. 'Tis of the last type of evangelistic work that I would speak—the kind of work that commands the admiration of the angels of God.

'Tis work, let me hasten to say, from which is taken away all thought of numbers. Not that ten—other things being equal—are not better than one; or, that

one hundred are not better than ten, or a thousand than a hundred—but that the size of the work so far as it may be shown in the records is by no means the important thing.

Numbers are ever misleading. I heard of a man down here, not far away from where we are to-night, who recently told a brother preacher that he was in the midst of a great revival in his church. "We are having a wonderful outpouring of the Spirit of God," said he, "a most gracious experience." "How many men have you taken in?" asked his friend. "Taken in?" said the preacher; "I haven't taken anybody in; I've put three men out."

Statistics are a curse. 'Tis a sin to number Israel. 'Tis puerile to judge of a man's work by the figures he turns in to the secretary at the Conference. Many of our eager mathematicians with the commercial spirit highly developed will corral a large group of so-called converts—children frightened to death by the story of the little boy who met the sudden summons of an angry God; women who hate to see a man beg and plead and never get what he asks

for; a few men who are flattered by attentions shown them or who are relieved by the promise of a life insurance for eternity at a scandalously low price—a group of converts in name only. Figures are ever misleading.

The full returns of one's toil can never be known. The work of Pentecost did not end when three thousand souls were added to the church; nor did the work of Stephen end when Saul of Tarsus saw him die. If it did, and the history of these two great days is fully told in the written record, then Peter did three thousand times the work of Stephen. But the returns are not yet all in. Had Stephen not died, the church would not have had Paul; and if the church had not had Paul, the current of history would have taken a radically different channel. I know of a poor woman who saves enough from her humble wages to support a native preacher in India—and to inspire a native preacher down here in Maine. I also know of a church with thousands of members—I heard the pastor tell the story last summer—that during fifty years of most assertive life has not sent out one standard bearer of the

cross. Who is to say whether my humble friend has not done more for the kingdom of grace and glory than the proud city church? I do not say that she has, for I would judge as I want to be judged. I do say that the returns are not yet all in. 'Tis quality, not quantity, that is to tell. Last winter a neighbor of mine held protracted services for a month. I met him Monday morning, the day following his greatest Sunday. "We had between sixteen and seventeen forward for prayers," said he. "How many?" said I, thinking that I had not heard correctly. "Between sixteen and seventeen." "You mean either sixteen or seventeen, don't you?" "Yes," was the answer, "didn't I say so?" "No," said I, "but you probably told the exact truth." Is he a man or half a man? Is he a coward or a leader? Is he concerned everlastingly over what he cannot do, or does he plan to run ahead of God's requirements? Does he whine along one mile, or show his loyalty and enthusiasm by going two? Is he eager to pay tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, or does he forget the petty nothings of Christ's discipline and remember mercy, judgment,

and truth? It is quality, not quantity, that must be taken into consideration, and the angels of God know it. The revival that stirs heaven is work that takes no account of numbers.

I know that the wish may be father to the thought, and so frankly say that I am prejudiced. Many a day have I prayed God to give me a decent-sized congregation; to be privileged to count by tens, not units—I dare not say by hundreds. Many an hour of humiliation have I known when I have thought of the little impression I was making on my day and generation. “Go down to the river, my brother, and put your finger in it; then pull it out and look for the hole you’ve made in the stream.” So said a bishop of our church to a brother who resented the fact that he had been overlooked in the assignment of appointments, and who in anger had come to him. Though I have no use for such cruel assertion of authority, I have felt at times that the bishop had rightly estimated the influence exerted by many of us. Still, I’m not talking of the impression made in Maine on the cabinet of a crusty bishop; I’m

speaking of the revival that stirred heaven. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

It is work that ignores all social distinctions. Let me frankly say that, other things being equal, I prefer the man with education to the man who has none; or, rather, the man with the gifts and graces of wisdom to the man who knows little or nothing. I prefer the man of character to the man of caution and cowardice, who turns with every change of popular opinion; I prefer the man who has the power to gratify defensible and laudable tastes and ambitions, who can summon help to build a church, or pay a poor man's rent, or relieve a case of destitution, or indulge some taste perfectly normal and allowable, though it may be largely personal, to the man who cannot count a score of dimes when his week's bills are met. "The best is none too good." And yet in the work of God 'tis the man who is to be considered, and not what the man may have: the man whom God sees, the man of possibilities, the man for whom the good Lord died; 'tis the man, not his money or his learning, or his sympathy with one's

purposes or plans. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." It is man's relation to God that is thought of; not to men or manners. "'Tis a sinner who is saved," is the word sent from lip to lip. Not an angel in the outer circle around the throne thinks for a moment of asking on what street he lived, or how many servants he kept, or whether he had a large or little bank account or none at all.

Years ago I received several persons into the church after a most interesting revival due largely to the prayer and energy of a child in my Sunday school. "It is true that there's new blood coming into the church," said the man who thought he owned us all; "it's new blood, but it's poor blood." May the good Lord pity him and all like him; and may the good Lord permit me to have nothing to do with him! For there are two lines of influence that send daily their impressions upon me—the spirit of Puritan democracy and the spirit of New Testament fraternity. I cannot forget what this land stood for among the people of this world two hundred years ago; nor what it stood

for when some of you men marched with song and shout and prayer to God to fight to a finish for the most advanced conception of freedom man has ever known. I cannot forget my prayer for the land to be cherished and loved, I trust, by our children's children to untold generations. I must remember my blood. So must I remember the lessons in high equality taught by my Lord.

I have read that a stout old warrior, a hero on many a field, when about to die, craved that his own name be kept from his tombstone. So, to-day—so men tell me—you may read where his body lies resting, awaiting the resurrection call, these words: "Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sidney." His own name no man knows. So, at times, when I go about my work, as I see down the street some poor fellow of no standing in the town, a wretch according to many of the standards we are compelled to adopt, I say, "Here comes a friend of the Lord Jesus Christ." The revival that stirs heaven knows nothing of social distinction.

One thing more: The work that the angels notice is work from which is taken away every element that is mystical. I

mean this: 'Tis contrition for sin, sadness for his miserable failure in life, penitence, that counts with those who take notice up yonder. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Not a word here about one's intellectual assent to truth! Partly, I presume, because something of such assent is inevitable where penitence is shown. The man is moved to tears and shouts for pardon or to agonized prostration before his God because he has seen and accepted some great truth. I know this—but I also know that the truth may be of the simplest and most elemental nature. Intellectual assent, then, is not sought, for 'tis not necessary.

The truth of it is, we have overworked our appeals for belief. We have magnified beyond all rightful limit the importance of our orthodox creed. "I found more biblical orthodoxy in the county jail than in the church," said an old preacher to me a while ago. I presume that he meant that he had found more men who said that they unhesitatingly believed the long list of conclusions saintly men had reached and handed to us as proven, or, at least, well worth the

testing among the men whose lives were a most pitiable failure, than among the men who daily try to keep close to God and who have fairly succeeded in their attempt. It is not what one says he believes that counts, for some of us believe mighty easily, while others never get sufficient proof. One man gets tired in fifteen minutes of fairly strenuous thought and so takes a short cut to great conclusions; another seems never to get tired, but doggedly, painstakingly, seeks for truth for years. One man calls his laziness loyalty, and his credulity simple faith; another man calls his honesty doubt, and his unspoken cry that he may love the Lord with all his mind, hardness of heart. One man could change his creed more readily than he could his coat; another could not retract though bound to the stake. Our confessions of faith amount to precious little.

So it is, I sometimes think, with our deeds. "There are ten thousand channels along which God may send us aid," said I in my last report to the Quarterly Conference, "ten thousand channels of which we know nothing." Yes, and there are thou-

sands of forces that may be borne along these innumerable channels. My part in the work of God is painfully small; so is yours. My deeds may seem large from my point of view, but not from the true one. A little fellow came down here a few years ago from one of the great cities to spend a two weeks' vacation. He wrote back to his mother telling her of his rare experiences. "Tom Reed has seen me two times!" said he. When that little fellow is grown he will never preach on the text, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints." To him his deeds seem large. But are they? Are your gifts and achievements of any size worth mentioning? Suppose you could give your millions, what of it? Suppose you could give your body to be burned, what of it? Suppose you could build a church in every town, or a schoolhouse on every hill? Suppose you could work and toil through the summer's heat and winter's chill for many a long year, what of it? Our deeds amount to little. No, it is not what we believe, nor what we do, but what we want to believe and crave that we may do; it is this that counts up yonder. It is the

attitude of one's will. Do you move toward God deliberately, or away from him? Do you want to find out that the creed of your sainted mother and the gospel preached by your honored father are true, or would you like to have it proven by the next ignoramus who comes home from Germany that they are all false? Would you like to go to heaven, or would you be ready to go to hell if the heat of the flames could be tempered a bit, or if you could arrange to have them powerless to touch you? What do you want, men? What do you cry out for in the very secret of your soul where God alone can hear? What is the master motive? What is the great current of your life? In what direction does it move—or would you have it move? It is this that counts; not your knowledge, so called, of the Person of Christ, or the plan of salvation.

Well do I remember a meeting I attended in the home of a brother not many years ago. I did not know what I was going to hear, or the devil and his angels could not have drawn me there. It was a mutual admiration society of spiritual experts. There was much said about Adam and

inbred sin; much about simple conversion; something about the Greek verb—or the tenses of a Greek verb—by a man who couldn't do a simple sum in long division; much about John Wesley; much about the Holy Spirit. At the close of it all an invitation was given by the stranger who had sought to make clear the very secrets of heaven for the man who agreed with him to come forward for prayer. He did not put it just that way, but it was clearly involved in the appeal. Everyone moved but myself. I sat stock still while they prayed for me. Thank God, say I, though they may count only such converts as twist their tongues to their clannish shibboleth, thank God, there is a place where a man's admission of wisdom is not needed.

“Quit your meanness,” said an old preacher once. That is what God wants. Turn about and walk toward the light. Forsake sin; fight every tendency to impurity, hypocrisy, cowardice, selfishness. Fight when in public and fight all the more when in private. Fight and fear no defeat, and, as you fight, listen for the assuring word of God. That's what God wants of

us, and this it is which takes the quick notice of the saints around God's throne. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Mind you, friends, I do not ask you to sit down and rest contented in your ignorance. He misses much who fails to see the truth that God in his Word, his world, and in the hearts of godly men has revealed. "Give attention to reading"; for you will miss enthusiasm if you fail daily to get glimpses of new truths. Neither do I put a premium on idleness. Spend and be spent in God's service. Have no fear that you'll die from overexertion fifteen minutes before your time. Work, and the good Lord will bless you in ways we cannot conceive. Still, I do ask you to hate sin, and to hate some sin that you could name; to love virtue, and to know what virtue is when you see it; to be true to the Saviour who compressed all "the law and the prophets" into two commandments, and who expanded them by the motive he put behind the very least requirement. Do this, and a work may be done here that heaven itself may leap to notice.

XII
JACOB AT BETH-EL
OR
IGNORANCE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."—Gen. 28. 16, 17.

LETTER OF THOMAS, JR., TO HIS FATHER

DEAR FATHER:

I've written to the old Seminary where you got ready to preach, asking the President to reserve a room for me next fall.

When Peter finished his sermon—this sermon I send you—he called on “some one to lead in prayer”—and I took the call! I couldn't help it, Father. I have stood too much these last few days not to break out at last. I'm happy for once, sure. I feel that at last I know what I should do. I ask your prayers—I mean I ask more of them. I ask and I give, for I never felt as tender toward you as I do to-night.

I'm coming home soon. If I can, I'll get away on the ten o'clock train to-morrow morning.

Lovingly,

THOMAS.

P. S.—Peter says that he hopes my three years in Arabia may not harm me. He's foolish enough to want me to start out immediately. Well, I'll miss him.

XII

JACOB AT BETH-EL

“SURELY the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.” So said Jacob at Beth-el, on his way to Haran, to the home of Laban, his mother’s brother. He has just awakened from a sound sleep; and as he rises from the ground where under the open sky with a stone for a pillow he had slept, he recalls the visions of the night. In his dreams he had seen a ladder reaching from earth to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. He had heard the voice of God saying to him, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac; and the place whereon thou liest, I will give to thee and thy seed”—and then he had awakened, and had cried out, “This is none other than the house of God, the gate of heaven. Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.”

His ignorance of the presence of God is not to be wondered at. He knew nothing of the worth of this glorious old world in

which we live. "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God"—words I heard a young man quote as we were roaming through the woods together, yesterday—this is a conception or interpretation of what man sees that is decidedly modern.

Jacob was in a desert. Before him were the dens of wild beasts; behind him stretched a long line of gleaming sand; on either side were desolation and loneliness. It was a desert, and to Jacob it was nothing more. Even the land of promise—fair Canaan, flowing with milk and honey—was little better. His fathers, Abraham and Isaac, dwelt in the land of promise as in a strange country, pilgrims and sojourners, ever confessing that they were seeking a better country and looking for a city whose builder and maker was God. Indeed, up to the day of our Lord—to the time when he gave his lessons concerning his kingdom here and now, to the hour when he called attention to the beauties of the lilies of the field clothed in a radiancy that even Solomon in all his glory never knew—to that day men knew nothing of the worth of this world. It was

a good place to get out of—that was all. To that day? Yes, and beyond that day. There are men now living who have no higher conception of the worth of this world than Jacob had—who put God just as far away. “Do you believe in a personal God?” said a young man to an old preacher I once knew. “What do you mean?” was the answer. “What do you mean by a personal God?” “Well,” said the young fellow, a bit staggered by the question, “I mean a big man sitting at the center of the universe ruling things.” “If that be your thought,” said the preacher, “I do not believe in a personal God.” “Then,” said the young fellow, quite triumphantly, “I’ll write you down a pantheist.” Still, he is not to be blamed for his crudity. He said spontaneously what some of us repeat deliberately in most sanctified tones and temper with a high complacency that is akin to the unshaken content of the Pharisee of old. “I believe,” say all of us, “that he ascended to the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” All right enough—“all this I steadfastly believe” and more

like it—all right enough if it does not mean that God has gone out of his world to some distant throne in the heavenlies, there to await the report from his messengers that 'tis time for him to come once more to this world of sin. All right enough if you say one thing and mean something else! The truth of it is, we are more careless in our deliberate speech than we are in our shouts of ecstasy.

The great hymn of the faith that we sang only a few moments ago breathes the prayer that we may ever ascend nearer to God—that we may go on and up through the chilly spaces—"Sun, moon, and stars forgot," up and on and on and up, ever speeding heavenward to reach at last the dizzy heights, the gates of heaven, where God and home may be found. All of which I steadfastly disbelieve.

"Speak to Him, thou, for he hears, and spirit with spirit
can meet—

Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and
feet."

He's here, men; he's here! A whisper even
is too loud a tone for your moment of best

devotion. He's here, and Jacob may as well know it first as last. God is in his world, and wants to be in the world, too. Never sing again, if you have the faintest regard for even the semblance of truth, about your pilgrimage through a desert land. If you do, you can sleep, not one night, but many a night, at the foot of God's ladder, lulled to sleep by the murmur of the angels hastening to do God's bidding—you may sleep night after night at Beth-el and never know that God is near.

Further, he knew nothing of his own worth. "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him." This, too, is a conception of the worth of a man that is decidedly modern. True, it was uttered nineteen hundred years ago; but the world did not receive it. It was left for the leaders of the last century or so fairly to appreciate and appropriate the truth concerning the worth of the individual in the sight of God. Nothing of this was known to Jacob. He was living centuries before the day of prophecy and the fullness of the gift of

God's Spirit; centuries before the illumination of the page of written history.

Then, too, he was a youth. Twenty years later he will stand here—on the banks of the brook Jabbok—a man of wisdom and ripe experience. Twenty years later he will go out into the darkness and meet God and not be disappointed. Twenty years later he will lose the name of Jacob and receive the new name of Israel—for he will have wrestled his way through to a victory that even God sees fit to have recorded for all time. Twenty years later he will be good for something—but not now. He is a youth running in cowardly fear from a brother whom he has cruelly wronged. Surely you remember his story.

One day Isaac, his father, old, infirm, and blind, in a return of the tastes of his youth, or a desire to reëxcite them if possible, asked for a dish of savory venison. Esau, the older son, heard the request and went at once upon the hunt to gratify it. Rebekah, the mother, who had also heard the request, saw the opportunity that she had for a long time been looking for. She saw how she could steal for Jacob, her

favorite boy, the blessing and the birth-right. "Go to the near-by flock," said she to Jacob, "and fetch me thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make of them the dish thy father desireth." He did so; and then with his hands and neck covered with the skin of the goats, anticipating with crafty shrewdness the fondling of his father and knowing that "Esau was a hairy man"—as the old record has it—he bore into his presence the steaming dish. Said the old man Isaac, as he took it, and as he was about to give the patriarchal blessing under the inspiration of a good dinner, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." His appetite put the burden of proof where it could not trouble him—a hairy hand meant more than a familiar voice. Said the old man to his wretch of a son, "Come near now, and kiss me"; and Jacob came. "Cursed be every one that curseth thee," said the father, "and blessed be every one that blesseth thee"; and then Esau returned.

I say, Jacob was not only a youth at Beth-el, but he was a mighty mean one, too. He had deceived his father and defrauded

his brother. "Hast thou not a blessing for me?" cried Esau, in his bitterness. "Bless me, even me also, O my father." It was the dastardly meanness of Jacob that wrung from Esau this cry of anguish, and that embittered his life for all time.

We must remember, I say, that Jacob was a youth and a sinner, and that sin ever blinds one—old as well as young—to a vision of one's true worth in the sight of God.

Well do I remember a young fellow who wrote me several years ago desiring to have his name stricken off our roll of probationers. "I have done wrong," said he, "and cannot stand as a hypocrite. Please take my name off the roll. I'm sorry, and I believe that God has forgiven me; still, I must not stand in a false position." Do you think I took the name off? Come, do you think I summoned the saints that I might lament with them concerning the subtle devices of the Evil One who could enter even the charmed circle of last winter's converts and select one for himself? Do you think that I erased his name? If you do, you do not know me; for, by the grace

of God, I did nothing of the kind. I sent for the blackest and most indelible ink that I could find and wrote that name down to stay. "God bless you," I said, in my reply to him, "if God has forgiven you, who am I to stand in your way?" The young fellow told me afterward that he received my letter one morning just as he was finishing his chores about the farm. He said that he took the letter and went up to the loft of the barn. He went over in a corner, out of sight and out of hearing. He took the letter from his pocket—the letter as yet unopened—and put it down before him. Then he fell over on his knees and prayed that God might see fit to send some word of cheer, for his heart was well-nigh broken. Then he opened the letter and read the most inspired epistle I have ever been privileged to write. "Onesimus never got as much out of Paul's letter to Philemon," said he to me two or three years later, "as I got out of your words." But he said that he was surprised. He had no idea that he would find the one word he needed. He hoped, yet hoped against all reason, as he supposed. His sin had blinded him so that

he could not see his own worth. Little did he know that from that day to the present he would never waver. Little did he know that God had summoned him to preach the gospel. Little did he know of the long years of intimacy he and I were to know—of intimacy that would grow to an affection such as many a family circle cannot rival at its very center. Little did he know of the sermons he would preach, the sinners he would warn, the saints he would comfort, the aged whose descent along the western slope of life toward the setting sun he would make easy. Little did Jacob know that he would be an Israel. He knew nothing of his own worth.

More than this: He knew nothing of the worth of his God. "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory"—that, too, is a conception that is decidedly modern. That God should come to bless and not to blight, to give and not to get, to help and not to harm, is more than Jacob could possibly conceive. Centuries later Moses said of God, "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our

iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath." Centuries later Moses thought of wrath and anger when he thought of God. Jacob was no better; he could think no higher thought. He did not know God any more than he knew the sacred soil on which he slept or the possibilities in the sinner who bore his tainted name.

So there are men to-day—countless thousands of them—who do not know God. If they did they would make much more of the first tenet of the great creed of the church. "My creed is a short one," said a schoolmaster to me the other day. "I have only two articles in my confession of faith. I believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." "What!" said I, "do you believe all that? Have you gone so far forward? Wait a bit till I catch up with you. I'm afraid you'll leave me struggling along the rocky road of orthodoxy." "What do you mean?" said my friend. "Just what I say," was my reply. "You have a gloriously long creed—not a short one; and if you believe it unshakenly you

are ahead of some of us who subscribe to as many articles as Paul had stripes laid upon his quivering back. It is no little thing to believe in God and to know what God is like." Would to God some of you knew him as you ought! 'Tis for this reason that I read the gospel story so repeatedly. 'Tis for this reason that I live in the New Testament and keep sweet fellowship with John. I want to know my God—for as Jesus of Nazareth was, so God is. "He that hath seen me," said Christ, "hath seen the Father."

So, men, I know what to pray for as I see you listening to me to-night. So, man, I know whom to pray for—for my heart goes out to God especially for one of this group. God knows his name—and he knows that God knows. I know what and whom to pray for.

May you know the worth of this old world in which we live! May you know the sacredness of the very spot on which we stand! May you know that "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God"! May you know your own worth! Twenty years from now

some of you will be preaching the gospel of a triumphant and gloriously tested Saviour. Twenty years from now some of you—if my vision is as clear as the ladder-dream of Jacob of old—twenty years from now some of you will be leaders of men. May you get a bit of a vision of the future and see what you may be! May you know your God—may you see him as he enters the wine press to tread out the vintage alone—may you hear him cry, “I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold”! May you know him, his nature and his need, and then wake up, make your pillow a pillar as did Jacob of old, and call this sacred place none other than the house of God and gate of heaven—a Beth-el blessed by the presence of God Almighty!

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